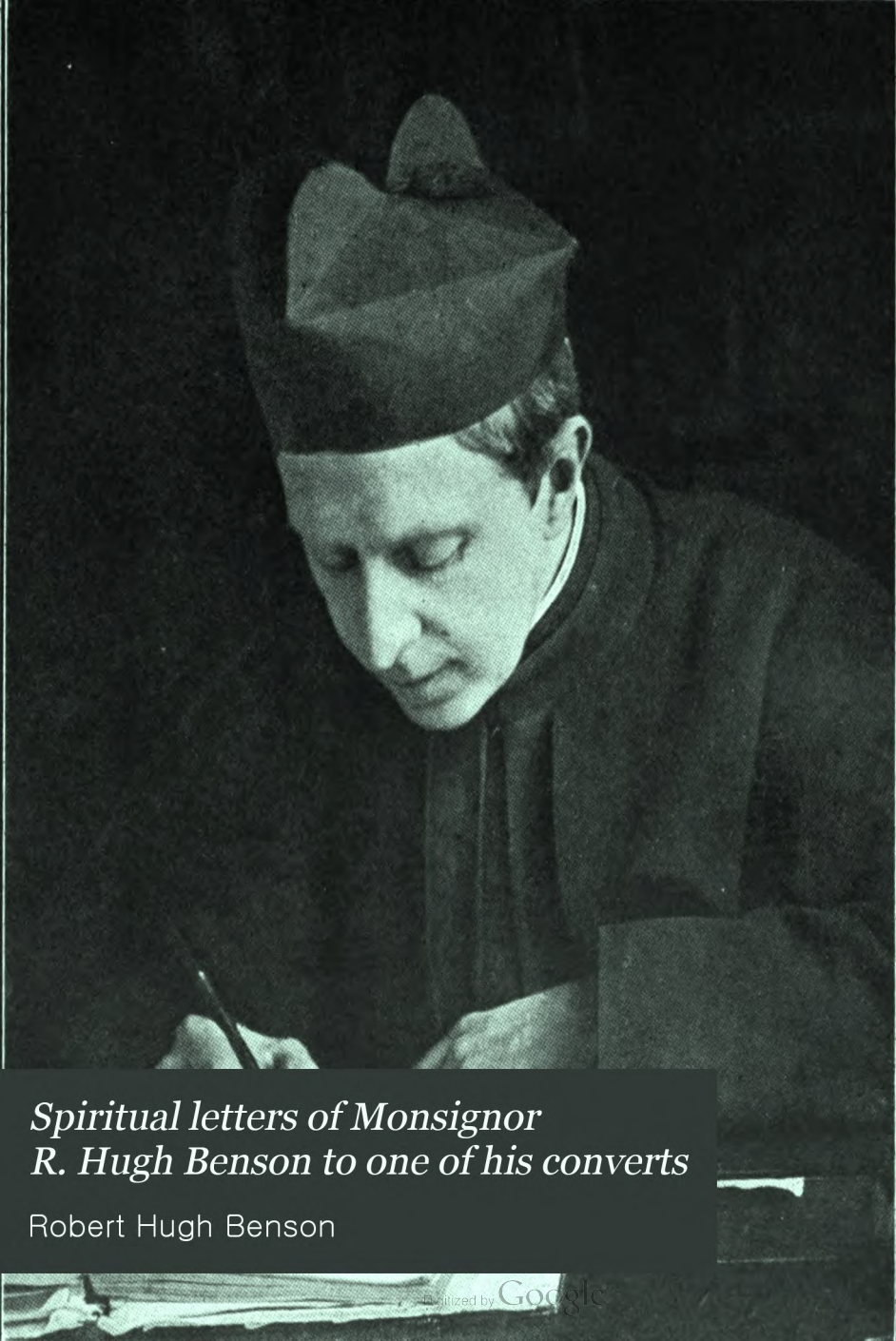
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# *Spiritual letters of Monsignor R. Hugh Benson to one of his converts*

Robert Hugh Benson

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# SPIRITUAL LETTERS

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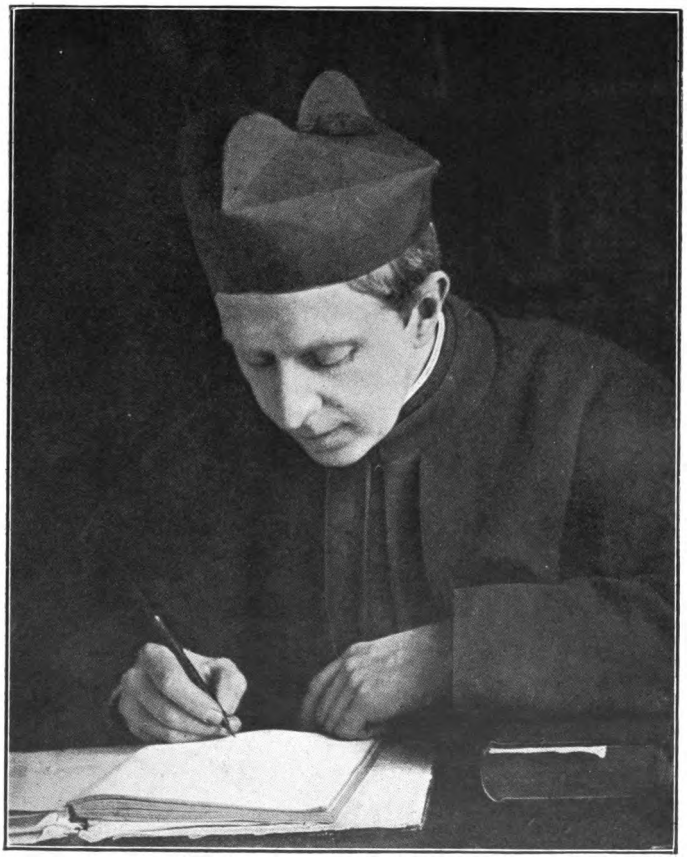
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# LETTERS of
# R. HUGH BENSON
# HIS CONVERTS

EDITED BY A. C. BENSON

WITH PORTRAIT

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.
FOURTH AVENUE & 30TH STREET, NEW YORK
LONDON, BOMBAY, CALCUTTA, AND MADRAS
1915

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R. Rhys Morgan

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# SPIRITUAL LETTERS *of* MONSIGNOR R. HUGH BENSON TO ONE OF HIS CONVERTS

WITH A PREFACE BY A. C. BENSON

*WITH PORTRAIT*

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# PREFACE

THE letters of which this volume consists had begun to appear in my brother's lifetime, with his full consent and approval, as a series of articles. He had indeed himself seen and criticised the earliest of them. The recipient of the letters consulted me as to their publication in book-form, and as my brother left me in his will the whole of his papers and manuscripts, I feel that he intended me to have the full responsibility of using my discretion as to publication. In the present case it is perfectly clear to me that it was his wish and intention that the letters should appear, while I have no doubt that he would have sanctioned their appearance in the form of a book.

Moreover, on reading them, it seemed to me that they illustrate in a very peculiar way some of my brother's most marked characteristics, not only his enthusiasm and swift expressiveness, but



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his eager desire to respond to every call and claim for sympathy and interest, as well as his grace of loyal and continuous kindness. He said once that he could not "prop"—that people came to him and passed on. This may sometimes have been true, but I think it was generally his consultants who passed on, and not himself! I have been allowed to see more than one series of his letters, and there is never any sign of his care and sympathy failing, so long as they were needed and desired.

It is not here my concern to endorse all the opinions my brother expressed; but I was never out of sympathy with him, though I do not think and believe as he did. I do in any case most heartily desire the frankest expressions of faith and belief, and especially when anyone not only holds a creed, but translates it into daily life as eagerly and single-heartedly as my brother did. We ought to do all we can to understand and appreciate another's point of view, and most of all when that corresponds to a faithful and beautiful handling and interpreting of life. That is our best and only chance of arriving at a substantial Christian unity and an active fellowship in noble aims. And thus I am glad that

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this glimpse should be given of an inner life full both of "fire and music," as my brother's life undoubtedly was, and as these letters most clearly testify.

ARTHUR C. BENSON.

MAGDALENE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE,
*February* 11, 1915.

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# EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

MAY I explain very shortly how this book comes to be published ?

About a year ago I was asked by the Editor of the American *Rosary Magazine*, as an old friend and early convert of Monsignor Benson, to write a paper about him for the *Rosary*. It was a commission from which I should certainly have shrunk had it not occurred to me that it would be possible—remembering a long-ago permission he had given me—to let Monsignor Benson speak for himself in words far more effective than any of mine, by quoting certain extracts from the letters which it had been my privilege to receive from him, as friend and Spiritual Director, since the days when we were both Anglicans.

The proofs of this article, " Monsignor Benson as a Letter-Writer," were approved by him in New York in April 1914 ; and when I sent him a copy of the magazine, some six weeks later, he wrote (and I hope—I almost dare to be-



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lieve—he would say the same of this book to-day):

"I think it is perfectly *delightful;* a great deal too kind and appreciative, of course: but in excellent taste. I have no criticisms; but only gratitude."

After this, the Editor asked for more such articles; and, in giving his permission (at the end of June 1914) for me to compile several more, Monsignor Benson approved unreservedly of the lines which I had laid down, and on which alone it was possible to proceed. The recipient of the letters must be anonymous, and entirely conceal all clues to identity. Nothing personal or private was to be published, but only such passages as might have been written to any convert, generally speaking. The MS. of each article was to be submitted to him. (These conditions are, of course, perfectly obvious. Over the second, particularly, I have watched with jealous care, especially throughout these articles in their present form. Not one single letter, scarcely a paragraph, but has some omission, necessary, but regrettable.)

Monsignor Benson, however, wrote to say that if I observed the first two conditions I need not trouble to send the MS. to him. Thus he never saw the later articles, which began to appear in

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the *Rosary Magazine* last October. The first, which he approved, has been broken up into the first three articles in the present volume, with the addition to each of many more letters; while, as far as possible, I have endeavoured to retain the original text of the slight thread of commentary which appeared in "Monsignor Benson as a Letter-Writer."

Even so, it may appear incomprehensible to some that any friend of Monsignor Benson's could give the world any private letter of his. The answer is one of his own favourite paradoxes —it was extraordinarily difficult and yet easy. First, it has been an enormous effort to publish these letters at all: because, except for merely descriptive passages, all are personal, and most relate to intimate and private matters of direction. Yet gradually it began to appear actual selfishness not to do so. It has often seemed to me, as I read, for example, such word-pictures as those written at Rome, that others ought to enjoy that which, though written to cheer one solitary convert, might certainly be read with delight by hundreds. Again, to say nothing of the literary value of the descriptive passages referred to, the letters to an Anglican hesitating on the threshold of the Church seem to me to remove mountains from the path of such converts.

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So with all the rest. There is yet a third aspect of the matter—vital now, though insignificant a year ago: these letters show Monsignor Benson in a light which is not the same as that thrown on him by his books, or even his sermons. And circumstances having so ordained that as in one way or another—probably through being an exceptionally tiresome "case," continually in need of correction, encouragement, or special direction—I am possessed of a larger share of these delightful letters than falls to the lot of most of his converts, it seems to me that one way of expressing my intense gratitude to their writer is by giving others a chance to benefit by a few of them. At the same time I have consented to their publication in book form with much hesitation, at the earnest request of the Editor of the *Rosary Magazine;* for, though many of the letters have already appeared in America, probably scarcely anybody has read them in England.

I may also say that it is now more than seven years since Monsignor Benson first gave me permission to do, in effect, what I am doing to-day; and this permission was renewed more than once latterly. Had he lived, this book, as I believe, would have appeared with a Preface by himself.

My sincere thanks are due to Mr. A. C. Benson,

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who has not only allowed the publication, which he had the right to forbid, but has also most kindly consented himself to write a Preface.

In editing the letters I have omitted, except where necessary, any sort of comment by myself; and in speaking of their writer I have throughout referred to him as Father Benson, except when it was obviously possible to use the title Monsignor.

It is my most earnest hope that this book, which is not mine, but Monsignor Benson's, will bring to many of his friends a measure of that consolation which, for twelve years, his letters brought to me.

LONDON, *January* 14, 1915.

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# SPIRITUAL LETTERS TO A CONVERT

## I

## ANGLICAN LETTERS

SINCE the appearance of *Confessions of a Convert*, one does not feel that one is intruding on intimately personal matters in speaking of Father Benson as an Anglican. He has told us much in the *Confessions*. But he has not spoken of himself as the spiritual director, even then, of a large number of souls. Such, however, was the case, and among them were found many of his first converts.

The letters I shall quote under this heading will probably be a revelation to many, especially to those who had not the joy of knowing Father Benson in his Anglican days. From the first day when, as an Anglican, I went to confession to him—both sincerely believing ourselves to be Catholics—he became my director not only in spiritual, but, by force of circumstances, in many important temporal matters. Through the mercy of God I owe not only my conversion to him; but, directly or indirectly, every good thing that has happened to me since I became a Catholic—to his help, his sympathy, his influence, and his



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prayers. Of his friendship I do not speak; but I maintain that no one could possibly owe more to him, and I think the implicit proof of that statement will be found in these letters.

The "Anglican Letters" cover a period of nine or ten months, from November 1902 onwards. The earlier ones, relating as they do chiefly to forms of mental prayer, were written after a Retreat preached by Father Benson, at which I was present. The notes of that Retreat, written out fully, and reproducing almost the exact words spoken, are in my possession. They might have been preached by a Catholic priest. Indeed, there is much, both in form and matter, which is identical with at least one Retreat given by him in later years.

The first letter deals with a form of meditation which Father Benson had explained in the Retreat.

(i) "As regards the Blosian method—in a sense it makes one's meditations alike, but one must partly expect that. After all, the object of all 'intellectual' meditation is to lead up to acts of the will: and acts of the will are bound to be like one another. But the result of continued acts is a habit: and monotony is a price well worth paying to obtain *habits* of contrition, adoration, and so on.

"As you say, however, it is extremely good not to neglect the intellect; and I should say that your plan of taking [the Spiritual Exercises

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of St. Ignatius during] the weeks through from Septuagesima till Easter is an excellent one. . . . Also, if you do feel the need of more activity of intellect, I would return from time to time to the Ignatian method [after Easter].

"As regards depression and 'touching the walls of the house,' I meant that the cause of depression is subjectivity, *always*. The Eternal Facts of Religion remain exactly the same, always. Therefore in depression the escape lies in dwelling upon the external truths that are true anyhow; and *not* in self-examination, and attempts at 'acts' of the soul that one is incapable of making at such a time.

"Is that at all clearer? Therefore to your question: 'Is it any good to force oneself to pray?' I would say that 'subjective prayer' and self-reproach, and dwelling on one's temporal and spiritual difficulties, is not good at such times; but that objective prayer, *e.g.* intercession, adoration, and thanksgiving for the Mysteries of Grace, is the right treatment for one's soul. And of course the same applies to scruples of every kind."

The next two letters deal with the question of offering one's life for a particular person or object; or, as Catholics would say, for a particular intention.

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(ii) "The question you ask is a very difficult one, and very much disputed. I have heard of learned and holy Religious who have said 'No' quite plainly: but others take other views.

"So one dare not answer dogmatically. But it seems as if one can say with tolerable safety:

"(1) Our Lord's Self-oblation is the only truly acceptable oblation.

"(2) Any other oblation in union with this, is acceptable in virtue of that union.

"And therefore that one can 'apply' any personal oblation, in union with that of Our Blessed Lord, on behalf of any object that one desires: and that *in this sense* such a vicarious oblation no more derogates from the dignity of His Oblation than prayer derogates from the dignity of His Intercession, or the Cross derogates from the Sacrifice of Calvary. Neither an oblation of self, nor prayer, nor the Holy Sacrifice have value except so far as they are applications and extensions of the merits of Our Blessed Lord.

"I am afraid this seems confused; but I think it is the only way I can answer it. Briefly, I should say that you *can* offer your life for another, so long as you in no sense regard it as apart from our Lord's One and Only Oblation.

"But I should hesitate, if I were you, to make such an offering for that *one* object. It might be

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safe to *include* that object among others for which you wish to dedicate yourself; but I would not make it the only one. A life that in any sense of that kind rests upon a personal affection, however deep or sincere, has not the strongest foundation. It is astonishing how our Lord will not allow to His closest children, in religion, any *absorbing* love, except the love of His own adorable Person. He allows, indeed, many affections and relationships that are most happy; but they must not be central. They may be buttresses, but not pillars, of the spiritual building.

"May our Lord bless you and keep you, and bring you closer and closer to Himself."

(iii) "About the matter of dedicating a life on behalf of any one particular soul—you say that 'humanly speaking' you owe all to —— ——.[1] But it is that very phrase that expresses what I mean; it *is* 'humanly speaking' only. More and more it appears true that the share of souls in the work of God is so insignificant as to be practically negligible. I think I know well what your heart must feel towards one through whom such great blessings have come: and that very fact must be a sign that there is danger of dwelling more on the channel than on the Source. . . .

[1] An old and valued friend, who was the unconscious instrument of my meeting Father Benson.

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But I would still rather advise the coupling with this object some other object of the same kind which is of equal importance *generally*, though not personally, to you: *e.g.* some work of God abroad or in the spiritual world. But still, this is not my business at all.

"If there is anything at all you would care to ask about the Meditations in the Retreat I shall be delighted to answer if I can. . . . I am so glad you like *Divine Revelations*. It is a marvellous book, I think, for quieting anxious souls in these anxious times. It is so fundamental, and confident in God."

The date of the above letter is January 15, 1903. Many of those who knew him will remember his love for the *Revelations of Divine Love*, of the mystic anchoress, Mother Julian of Norwich. Father Benson had quoted from this book largely and often during the Retreat which has been already mentioned. After he became a Catholic I sent him a beautiful Anglican translation in my possession, with which he expressed himself "delighted. It is about my path by day," he wrote, "and my bed at night. Can you really spare it?"

The next letter is quoted almost *in extenso*.

(iv) "The first thing you speak about is very difficult to write about, because words have such different values with different people; and the same spiritual experiences would be variously

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described by various people. It appears to me, however, that Père Grou and Brother Lawrence are not contradictory, because they are speaking of different things. May I try to put it coarsely in my own language?

"The soul appears to have two departments. There is (1) the ordinary activities; understanding; *intellectual* attention; emotion; and one kind of imperfect memory. These faculties are used constantly by every sane person, good or bad. All such words as 'clever,' 'stupid,' 'good memory,' &c., are all applied to this important but superficial department. (2) The real part of the soul—the immortal part that we take with us when we die—is that, to my thinking, which is called the 'image' of God. It is 'capable of God.' Here the real *character* resides; the real self. It is by this we shall be judged. It is here, too, that the real *will* resides. The 'character' of this self is formed and deformed and reformed by its use of the more external powers I have called '(1).'

"Now it appears to me that Père Grou means that we cannot always keep '(1)' fixed upon God. For example, to take the instance you take, in teaching you are bound to concentrate all those powers under '(1)' upon the business in hand. To withdraw them, even to fix them

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on God, would be to misuse them; because God has given us them to arrive at Him *indirectly* with.

"But Brother Lawrence means that it is possible to keep '(2)' always fixed upon God—the deep inner self; so that when your whole *intellectual* powers are engaged in teaching, your soul is with God. 'I sleep, but my heart waketh.' But this requires effort. Therefore at certain times to make deliberate *intellectual* acts of the Presence of God: and *emotional* acts of Love: and acts of *memory* in recalling His Passion, &c.—all these are good, and tend to steady the deep inner self on God. Sin has affected every part of our nature—spoilt even the 'image,' so that our tendency is not even to keep that part of self fixed on God. Gradually, however, as the work of sanctification goes forward, the inner self '(2)' spends longer and longer periods with God; and its attention gets more and more intensified, and its control of the outer department gets more and more complete, until ultimately the real self never stirs from contemplation. Mary is always at His feet, while Martha does her business without distracting Mary: and every now and then herself comes in to Mary too.—I am putting all this so badly, but I hope it is true, and intelligible.

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"As regards your second point, as to distractions, it seems true that the way to meet them is not by effort, but by cessation of effort; not by wrestling with them, but by simply dropping them. This is surely the good point in the Quietists. It runs all through their system. It is of course capable of dreadful abuse, but within limits it is wonderfully true, and such a relief to a tired soul. What is needed to get into the Presence of God is not a strong aspiration, but a letting all else drop, and falling into God. So too when the ordinary thoughts resume their activity, and distractions begin, the way to deal with them is to let them go again.

"If we picture God as a vast still abyss in the depth of our soul, with cliffs round, and winding ways leading to it, it is a help. The simplest way, *if only we have faith*, is to throw ourselves off the cliff into Him—(or of course we may climb by 'acts' laboriously down to Him). Then our restless self begins to climb up the cliffs again into the common day. Then repeat the process of letting go. It is so *much* simpler and less tiring than climbing down.

"As regards the Ignatian method of meditation. Its object is to develop the external powers '(1)' in the service of God; and is of course a most important part of spiritual life.

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But everyone has their natural method ordained by God: and if this causes you great distress and difficulty, after finishing the course quickly, I would rather advise your trying the Blosian method. In fact I would advise your doing the latter, as it is, for at least a few minutes in the day, as well as the Ignatian. I would not advise your giving up the Ignatian as you have begun, until you have ended it: and then to take a complete rest from it, and practise the Blosian. I cannot help thinking that it is to the latter that God is leading you. No better book could be found than 'Mother Julian' to be used as material for mental prayer. (I enclose a little leaflet which I drew up some while ago on the Blosian method. It is almost the same as the one the *Church Review* issued.)

"I should recommend your getting *A Short Rule and Daily Exercise*. . . . It is a wonderful pamphlet by Blosius: and will answer your difficulties far better than any scraps I can write down of my ignorance.

"Therefore, to recapitulate: I would recommend your continuing the Ignatian method . . . just as a simple act of Faith in a method that has produced its own peculiar saints. At the same time to make your spiritual reading a kind of continual mental prayer, according to the de-

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scription given in the leaflet. Then, when you have finished the Ignatian . . . to leave it altogether for a year or so, and continue the Blosian.

"As regards the 'materialistic' difficulties of the Ignatian meditations on hell, &c., it may be a help to remember that our senses are merely *one set of instruments* for receiving spiritual truth. To say that hell 'smells of brimstone' is a sort of 'sacramental' way of conveying to oneself some mysterious spiritual quality of hell: just as to look at a rose is to see the Beauty of God.

"And after all, this method of presentment is that used by our Blessed Lord in the [book of] Revelation. It cannot therefore be *merely* conventional. To *exercise the senses is to obtain a truth about hell, &c., which is probably unobtainable by any other means.*

. . . . . .

"May God bless you, and show you more and more of Himself. Indeed you have my prayers."

Lest any should be unfamiliar with the "Blosian" form of meditation, it may be said shortly to be the raising of the heart to God in acts of Faith, Hope, Love, Contrition, &c., inspired by the reading of some spiritual book, and uttered at the moment when the heart is moved to make them. Such a meditation—made of course after suitable preparation—might thus consist almost entirely of "acts," intellectual and emo-

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tional; or, on the other hand, of a spiritual reading fruitful only in distractions. The important thing is the intention. As Father Benson points out in another letter, "it may be better to spend half an hour in driving away distractions deliberately and firmly than twice the time in making what we may think to be a really good meditation, with great sensible devotion."

The next letter is dated April 16, 1903, and, like all those quoted under this heading, was written from Mirfield. It is chiefly in answer to a question about Quietism.

(v) "Thank you so much for your letter, and kind Easter wishes. May I in return wish you every joy at this season, with a continual and deepening increase of grace flowing from our Risen Lord?

"In your previous letter you asked about books. It is difficult to recommend books beyond those that one has found helpful for oneself. But I will do my best with that.

. . . . . .

"As regards the Quietists, reading their own books is always more enlightening than reading about them. And I should strongly recommend Mme. Guyon's *A Method of Prayer*. . . . One has to bear in mind that they were condemned; as it was found that their disciples gradually came to despise all external religion, such as sacraments, relics, rosary, preaching, and vocal prayer.

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They even went so far as to discourage specific petition, saying that a state of prayer was higher. It is quite easy to see how all this came about, and how their very grasp of *truth* made them one-sided. As long as one keeps all this before one's mind, one can get no harm by them, and nothing but good, I should think.

"Molinos' *Spiritual Guide* is *well* worth reading. . . . You know *John Inglesant*, no doubt? That gives one a slight sketch of Molinos' [teaching]. If you come across Viscount St. Cyres' *Fénelon*, the chapters on the Quietists are worth reading to see what their enemies said.

"If I can be of any use as regards recommending any other books I shall be delighted to do what I can. We have a very large library here, and I could probably give you any information if you would let me know on what lines you desire it. Thank you so much for asking for objects for prayer. I will give a list on the last page of this paper.

"May our Lord increase His grace in you more and more."

The last request for prayer, at the end of this letter, was "For myself; a profitable time of rest this spring and early summer" (1903).

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But Father Benson was still at Mirfield five weeks later when he wrote the next—and, as far as the present writer is concerned, his last—Anglican letter; if that be excepted in which he announced his immediate reception into the Church.

(vi) "May I say first, in answer to your first question, what a relief it is to come across anyone who doesn't know about 'science'? Personally I fear I am a hopeless person to ask about it; it always seems to me a 'red herring' in Christian apologetics; and that unless one REALLY knows about it, like Fr. ——, one had much better keep to generalities, such as that science and religion have no more to do with one another than, *e.g.*, geography and music! They are both branches of truth, and therefore both come from God; but beyond that, &c. Or that the real difficulties in accepting Christianity are moral and *not* intellectual, at least in 99 cases out of 100. But I am hopelessly prejudiced! And you had much better ask Fr. —— what he thinks; I am sure he would be delighted to be of any use he could.

"With regard to the other, naturally I know even less! But at the same time I do most entirely sympathise; the details that one desires in Heaven vary, of course, with various people; but we all have them in some form.

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Now it appears to me that we must allow that EVERYTHING, even the smallest details, is sacramental; and both represents and conveys some spiritual detail necessary for one's entire spiritual satisfaction; and therefore that there must be some provision whereby these details form part of one's 'treasure in Heaven.' When one doubts, therefore, as one is constantly tempted to do, in this matter, is it not the old temptation to doubt God's INFINITE Care? One can, by a sort of magnifying, believe that God is very 'great'; but that does not in the least really approximate to His Infinity. It is exactly because He is Infinite, and not only very great, that those very details MUST be included under His Infinite Care. There is a beautiful illustration of Fr. Tyrrell's on the MODE of identity being preserved, and yet being changed. A child, he says, has her heart quite full when she holds her doll in her arms; but when she becomes a mother, and holds her firstborn child in her arms, she smiles at the thought of her doll, and of all that it meant to her. Yet it is the same sort of joy, and *full of the same sort of familiar details*, but of a higher order altogether. So, when the same mother meets her child in Heaven, she will laugh to think she ever thought she knew what a mother's joy was before.

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"(Fr. Tyrrell always seems to me to say the last possible word!)

"As regards what to believe [about Heaven] one may almost say that it is DE FIDE to believe that one's most detailed imagination cannot approach the details of God's provision. Above all, those details that relate to 'service' such as you speak of, cannot be absent.

"I am afraid this is a meagre answer, but what can you expect?

. . . . . .

"I am so delighted that you have something to do that brings you nearer to your desire. Nothing is so paralysing as standing still."

Very shortly after this letter was written Father Benson left Mirfield, and began to work at *By What Authority?* which was written in the summer of 1903.

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## II

## EARLY CATHOLIC LETTERS

FATHER BENSON'S kind and frequent spiritual letters, from a few of which the foregoing quotations are taken, gave no idea of the mental suffering through which he was passing during this time. Anxious not to trouble him unnecessarily, I did not write to him between May and September 1903. It was in reply to my question early in the latter month, "When are you going to preach another Retreat?" that I received the overwhelming news of his intended and immediate reception into the Church. The heading of his letter was enough. The fact rushed out full-armed before one had even glanced at the writer's words. Father Benson was going to become a Roman Catholic! Then, if he was not a Catholic now in the Church of England, what was he? What was I?

Up to the very day of his submission I fancy that very few of his spiritual children had any idea of the crisis through which he was passing. Speaking for myself, I know it came as a thunderclap. It is no exaggeration to say that the very foundations of Faith and all the realities of the Spiritual Life rocked and trembled from the violence of this utterly unexpected shock. "What is Truth?" was the only question it was at first possible to formulate in those hours of darkness



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and anguish. To all of us High Anglicans who were under Father Benson's direction he had ever been primarily and essentially a Catholic priest—a statement which may seem obvious nonsense to a born Catholic, but which will be understood by any Anglican convert. It was extraordinarily difficult to know why one whom we looked upon as a pillar of "English" Catholicism should have found it necessary for his salvation to submit to the Church of Rome. And it was precisely on account of our absolute conviction that he must necessarily have taken this tremendous step because he believed he could not otherwise save his soul, that so many of us were led to study the question under his direction, after he entered the Church, and finally to become Catholics ourselves. Those who were fortunate enough to know Father Benson in the days when he belonged to the Community of the Resurrection will bear me out when I say again that, before as well as after his conversion—*i.e.* before his ordination in June 1904—he was to his spiritual children a Catholic priest above everything.

He was, as everyone knows, received into the Church on September 11, 1903, at the Dominican Priory Church of Woodchester, in the beautiful Cotswold country he loved so well, and of which he wrote a few months later:

(i) "All that country is bound up with my own happiness in my mind; the great hills and valleys, and the miles of tableland at the top—like the life of prayer: monotonous, with sensational approaches, but high up."

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Within a week of his reception Father Benson wrote to me to thank me, with gratitude which, considering the subject was intensely pathetic, for a letter I had written to him.

(ii) "The best I can do in answer is to do my best to reply to your questions as simply as I possibly can.

"First of all: the reason 'why I have done this' (because I have taken the step, last week), is because I believe that our Lord intended the See of Peter to be the centre of Unity of the Catholic Church; and that it is upon that Rock that He has built His Church.

"I won't dream of bothering you with all the reasons that have led me to this; but it appears to me as certain as anything can be. Of course I do not deny that there are difficulties; but so there are everywhere. And in this theory of Church Order and Constitution, there seem to me far fewer difficulties than in any other.

"As regards the second question: as to Anglican Orders, I can quite frankly say that it was not doubt in my Orders that led me to this. So far as my own *private* spiritual experience goes I was quite satisfied of my priesthood; but now that same 'experience' has led me to an authority that tells me I am not a priest. Then it is a choice between which I must follow and

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believe—my individual feelings and arguments, or the feeling and argument of what I believe to be a Divine Authority: and there is no choice as to which I must follow.

"Now I do not feel at all that this involves the renunciation and denial of all the graces that God has given me in the Church of England. God forbid I should ever do that! I still believe that He met me with pardon when I confessed my sins contritely; and fed me with the life of our Lord Jesus Christ when I went to Communion: but the difference lies in the *mode* of receiving the grace. But personally, I felt and still feel, that this is a minor point in the real question: the real question is, Where is the Authority of our Blessed Lord to be found *now?* Once a soul finds it, she must submit everything to Him: until she finds it, she must follow the best authority she can.

"As regards the argument: 'The Church which is good enough for So-and-so is good enough for me'—may I say I don't think that is sound? After all the two real centres for each of us are, God and my soul. ('Whoso loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.') It is a good argument as a buttress, but not as a central pillar: the central pillar must be one's own direct faith; not a vicarious faith. (I put

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it very badly, I am afraid.) Wesleyans may say that of Wesley . . . and many other really good and spiritual men who have lived and died satisfied with Wesleyanism. . . .

. . . . . .

"As to —— ——'s argument, would you dare to say that Wesleyans do not 'find God in Wesleyanism'? Yet Wesleyanism is not the true Church, even though they claim it. Surely every Christian in good faith 'finds God' wherever he may be serving Him; but in various degrees.

"I so much hate this letter of mine as I read it over: it seems controversial and argumentative; and yet I don't mean it to be that, because I don't believe that controversy ever was of any real good at all. And your letter has nothing of that sort in it. . . . Please write again as often as ever you please; I do so much hope that one's old friendships will not all have to be sacrificed. And I do from my heart wish you every blessing and good gift from God."

(In this connection—as regards Father Benson's dislike of and disbelief in controversy—the following passage from a letter written just after his return from Rome in June 1904 is illuminating:

(iii) "I am trying to get hold of a principle about one's attitude to outsiders; and it seems

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to me to lie somewhere in the direction of expounding one's own positive principles freely, but never of attacking another's position: drawing people to one's own stronghold instead of driving them out of theirs. I have found . . . that it simply destroys every shadow of bitterness to go on that line.")

The next letter is dated September 22, 1903.

(iv) "I will do my best to answer your questions; for, poor as my answers will be, I think to attempt them is the best way to show my real gratitude for your sympathy.

"First, I would like to say this: that to my mind all such difficulties are secondary. There are *unanswerable* difficulties in Christianity, widely considered: but we trust our Lord personally in spite of them: knowing that there is an answer to them all in His Divine Wisdom. So with the Church. The first thing to make sure of is the grounds of Faith. (1) Did or did not our Lord intend there to be a Divine Teacher on earth to the end? (2) If He did, where is it to be found? All else to my mind is secondary to that. Once one has found the Divine Teacher one asks questions, indeed; but it is only in order to know what to believe.

"It is possible, I suppose, to hold all, or nearly

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all the Catholic doctrines one by one, individually, because we have examined them and found them probable and reasonable; but that is not the root of the matter. The root is to have made the Act of Submission to the Divine Teacher. *Then* one's business is to find out what She teaches: but even before one knows any theology, one implicitly believes the entire Faith in its principles and details, just because one believes the Teacher who delivers it.

"Having said that, may I go on?

"(1) You say: 'If it was not wrong to use private judgment to go to an Authority, how can it be wrong to use it after?' Test that by practical experience: *e.g.* you become persuaded, *by Private Judgment*, that a certain doctor understands your constitution better than you do yourself: and you put yourself in his hands. Would it not be suicidal, after that, to judge of his remedies one by one, as to whether you would use them? The Church says: 'Here am I, with certain claims and credentials. I have a continuous spiritual experience for nineteen centuries; no break; I have a wide Catholic experience over all countries; my head is the Apostolic See with 1200 bishops in unity of faith. I point to the Scriptures that you accept, and I ask you to look at your own heart. Judge whether I am

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trustworthy or not. If you think I am, then put yourself wholly in my charge, and let me deal with you as I have dealt with millions of others of all races and ages and characters. If not, you must see to yourself. But my claim is peremptory. Take it or leave it: but you cannot take my privileges, and I will take no responsibility unless you put yourself wholly in my hands.' Now, is not that very peremptoriness an echo, or rather the very voice of our Lord, who '*spoke with authority, and not as the scribes*'? The scribes were always referring to schools of Rabbis and 'aspects,' and personal theologians. Our Lord breaks in: 'I SAY UNTO YOU.'

"(2) *Indulgences*. Briefly, indulgences are the remission of *temporal* penalties due to sin: *e.g.* David sins; Nathan rebukes, convinces, and absolves him. Yet the child died. Supposing David had made some tremendous reparation immediately, it is conceivable that God would have remitted the *temporal* penalty—the death of the child. That would have been an Indulgence.

"Every forgiven sin has an allotted penalty, to satisfy the Divine Justice. By the mercy of God He will remit even that if we will do something instead. His Church, to whom He has given the power of binding and loosing, has

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charge of that department, and says: 'If you, hating sin, free from guilt, full of purposes of amendment, will do this or that, you shall be let off a certain amount of temporal penalty.' That is an Indulgence. The old temporal punishment, or penance, generally lasted 'so many days'—*e.g.* 'For a week you shall fast on bread and water.' But the Church might say: 'If you will say the Penitential Psalms, you need only fast three days.' That is an Indulgence of four days. Then the old phraseology lasted on; and the word 'day' is a kind of measure—an unknown quantity—four 'days' are four times as much as one 'day.' As regards the dead, the Church claims no direct jurisdiction, but only gives the indulgence 'as in a prayer,' praying that God will apply good deeds, &c., vicariously for their benefit.

"I haven't put it at all well, I fear. . . . But I would advise your reading Ryder's answer to Littledale.

"(3) *Intention.* This means no more than an intention to do what the Church does. An infidel priest may not believe in the Real Presence: but he deliberately vests and goes to the Altar, and means to perform the rite, whatever it may be. In such a case, Mass is truly said. If you think of it in that way it is almost incon-

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ceivable to think anything else, I believe. . . . Does that make it any easier ?

"(4) *Communion in one kind.* If one once really believes in the Divine Teacher, this ceases to trouble one at all: because then the same Authority that said: 'Drink ye all of it,' now says: 'One kind is sufficient.' There are, too, just faint indications in our Lord's discourses. John vi. speaks repeatedly of the 'Bread that came down from Heaven'—apart from the Cup—as if it were a central Truth. But I don't wish to build on that; for it is only a private interpretation after all. Is the change any more serious than the abrogation of the Sabbath, and of circumcision, and of 'not eating with the blood'—all of which changes were wrought by the Divine Teacher ?

"(5) The R.C. Nicene Creed is to all intents and purposes the same as the Anglican. The only difference is the addition of the word 'Holy' in the expression of faith in the Church.

"You are thinking, I believe, of Pius IV's creed, which was found necessary to exclude certain heretics; just as the Nicene Creed itself was found necessary in the 4th century, when it had not been necessary before. As new heresies arise, the Church must continually be expressing herself more and more plainly to rule them out;

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and it is, to my mind, a serious indictment of the Church of England that she does not claim that power with regard to the laity.

"Well, it is very late, and you will have got bored long ago. So I must stop.

"Please do not think me argumentative. I dare say I can do nothing for you by explanations; but I can pray, and will, that the Holy Ghost will explain Himself to you.

"Do write if you wish, and can. I shall be *delighted* to hear and answer. But if you do not I shall quite understand: and shall only pray the more.

"I pray God to bless and keep you always."

Ten days later:

(v) "Now I will do my best.

"So long as a soul is persuaded that the Church of England is certainly as near to the truth, and that it contains the necessaries of salvation (&c.) as much as any part of Christendom, her duty is clear: she must remain in it. But many souls, of which mine was one, and perhaps yours another, become aware that there is one huge part of Christendom that makes an *exclusive claim:* and that that claim is at least not a preposterous one. The fact that it is the greatest Communion in point of numbers (1200 bishops); and that it

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rests in union with an undoubtedly Apostolic See; and that no historian can put his finger on any breach of continuity; and that the Church of England acknowledges her as a sister—all this entitles her to *consideration;* and causes these souls to whom all this has come as a *fact,* to ask themselves whether even her *exclusive* claim may not perhaps be true.

"The moment the soul has practically seen this, private judgment must begin. (Of course if the soul regards all this as an insidious temptation, she is bound in conscience to resist it. . . . But I am supposing that she begins to doubt whether, after all, it *is* a temptation, or whether it may not be Grace.)

"Therefore the 'two doctors' analogy, on this view, cannot be pressed beyond a certain point. Remember that the first doctor, 'A,' holds that 'B' *is* a doctor all right: but that 'B' will not act in consultation with 'A,' but says: 'You must be wholly mine; or not at all.'

"Well, if the patient thinks this is wholly unwarrantable arrogance, he must say so: but if he thinks that the *exclusive* claim of 'B' may be the right treatment, he must consider it. I gather from your letter you are in this stage. You are moderately satisfied with 'A.' You would like to have 'B' as well: but you find you

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can't. Well, you must consider then whether 'B's' exclusive claim is justifiable. Now all that must be done by private judgment; because the Church of England denies the exclusive claim: as if 'A' should say: 'I like "B" well enough, if only he wasn't so intolerably conceited. He is a good doctor, of course; but he thinks nobody is a doctor but himself.' This moderation of course sounds attractive and convincing: but grant for a moment that 'B' *is* what he claims to be! What then?

"No. I did not mean for a moment that the Church of England was not far nearer the truth in most ways than the Wesleyans, but that in this particular point they stood—I won't say on the same platform, but on similar platforms. As I think I said before, it was not doubt of Anglican orders that made me take the step; but since I have taken it, I receive what I am told with as much humility as I can. The explanation the Church gives me, and which I humbly accept, of my spiritual experience, is that at moments of confession and communion I made a spiritual effort, and God blessed it; and gave me many graces; but she tells me it was not '*per sacramentum*.' Now, can you imagine anything more arrogant than for me to turn and say to her: 'No. I can trust my spiritual sense better than

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yours, my Mother. I tell you I received it *per sacramentum* in spite of what you say!' (I ask no one to accept my position or arguments, of course, *until* they are in my position.) No. I trust her knowledge of Divine Mysteries better than my own. She does not bid me disbelieve in the *fact* of Divine Graces received in the Church of England, but only the mode of reception.

"Next. I believe the best way to arrive at the Truth is to try to look at Christendom as an outsider, so to speak: as a visitor from another planet. Examine the notes of the Church: UNITY. APOSTOLICITY. HOLINESS. CATHOLICITY. *e.g.* What part of Christendom is most at one? Which part preserves *Apostolic* authority (as distinguished from Episcopal)? Which part produces eminent Saints? Which most breaks down racial distinctions, and is independent of nationality, language, climate, century?

"Again, noticing that the R.C. Church bases her claim on Peter: examine Peter's position in the Gospels and Acts: make a list of his doings and sayings and prerogatives, and notice their *cumulative* force.

"I believe, personally, in considerations of that kind, made first-hand, rather than in reading controversial books; because a skilful pleader,

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unconsciously even to himself, will only mention those things that make for his side: and when he is detected everybody says: 'How dishonest'! —whereas the poor man really did not mean it; and only had eyes for his own side.

"But if you do want books, let me recommend Luke Rivington's *Authority* and *Dependence*, and above all, Allies' *See of Peter*. And if you care for Newman, *Development of Doctrine*. To me he is *the* Prophet: but to many I know he is merely sophistical. Also, if you can borrow it, I would recommend your reading Carson's *first* Essay in *Reunion Essays*: and Mallock's *Doctrine and Doctrinal Disruption*.

"(I mention the books—these latter ones at least—that helped *me* most. Mallock is simply overwhelming: and he is not a Roman Catholic.)

"As for —— ——, may I say something? His appeal is to the *Primitive Church*. But the Church is an *organism*, not an organisation. It is the Body of Christ, and therefore grows, develops, and *in a sense*, changes. —— —— appears to me to ignore this, always: *i.e.* his assumption is that the Early Ages are purer than the later: whereas the truth as it appears to me, is that the 'full-grown man' is nearer Christ's ideal than the baby (as regards perfec-

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tion of development). I think that is a thought worth considering. . . .

. . . . . .

"Forgive me if this letter is controversial. It is so difficult to steer a mean between a disloyal silence and an irritating garrulity! And the moment you say: 'Enough'—I stop.

"After all, there is nothing to fear or to be anxious about: God does not lay traps for us: and 'He never overdrives His sheep.' Pray for me that I may not, either."

The next letter deals very tenderly with that dread, inexplicable to Catholics, which so many converts feel at the thought of renouncing—with seeming ingratitude—the graces and ordinances and "privileges" of Anglicanism.

(vi) "I agree unreservedly with what you say about personal conviction. Of course it is absolutely essential; and until you have that you cannot dream of taking such an important step.

"I realise fully, I hope, that the wrench with you comes in feeling that you will have in a sense (if ultimately you take the step) to repudiate the past. But indeed that is not so. I could not *dream* of calling all the ordinances I joined in and celebrated, 'mockeries'! They were not, I now believe, *exactly* what I thought them; but they were acts of close and high communion with

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God: they were acts of worship to the Divine Majesty, and acceptable to Him: they were the great stepping-stones on which my soul went on towards God.

"And nothing in the world could ever make me think differently to that. It is not my heart or will that I judge to have been wrong: I only now see that my intellect was not accurately informed as to the modes in which God gave Himself to me."

Just at the time I had been deeply shocked and wounded by repeated acts of what I considered outrageous irreverence before, during, and after the celebration of Anglican communion, on the part of an old and violently bigoted Protestant clergyman, who was, I was made aware, anxious to mark his disapproval of my "Roman" tendencies. Into the nature of these irreverences—on one occasion affecting the sacrament of baptism—I need not enter. I had described them in detail to Father Benson, being greatly troubled by the knowledge that this old clergyman had, from every standpoint of law and common sense, as much right to call himself "priest" as had those High Church friends and guides of mine whom I still sincerely believed to be so. The thought was intolerable. How could a priest—a Catholic priest—be implicitly allowed to treat the elements of bread and wine, which were to me the Body and Blood of Christ, in such a way as to show ostentatiously that to him they were nothing of the sort? This was a difficulty—



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now resolutely faced for the first time—which went far deeper than any mere differences of ritual in Anglicanism. I took the whole matter not only to Father Benson, but to the generous and charitable Ritualistic clergyman whose fatherly kindness was so great a comfort to me at this time. His explanation did not quite convince me. But Father Benson says:

(vii) "I think ——'s interpretation of the old Calvinistic clergyman's irreverence quite beautiful and true. . . . But how appalling, objectively, the thing that has to be so explained! I know it is no argument, but it is dreadful to remember that that kind of thing is tolerated by the authorities, and that reverent Reservation is not—or scarcely.

"Yes, as you say, there is one test, as I believe, of Catholic Communion; and that is Communion with the See of Peter. When that is gone, all is gone: Apostolic Succession, validity of sacraments, this or that doctrinal question, are all secondary and comparatively unimportant."

In this letter Father Benson kindly offers to send me the rough draft of a paper that he was hoping to publish. This was the manuscript of the *City Set on a Hill*, now published by the C. T. S.; though the original preface, written by a well-known Dominican Father, was not at first included in the little volume. This, however, may possibly have been done in later editions.

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Almost every convert will be familiar with the pamphlet in its present form, but all may not know that (like *By What Authority?*) it was written while Father Benson was an Anglican. "I drew it up to clear my own mind," he says in a later letter, "rather than to convince anyone else."

Father Benson was, after this, strongly urged by the Dominicans to revise and publish the pamphlet; and it was the first revision that he very kindly sent to me.

"I do pray God," this letter ends, "to help us all to see His Truth more and more plainly every day."

(viii) "Please do not dream of 'troubling' me," begins the next. "I will so gladly go on for two or twenty years, writing; because I am so certain where Truth lies . . . and I cannot believe that some day you will not, too. There are all kinds of things to keep you where you are, in good faith. In fear, reality and hallucinations are so mixed that it is impossible always to distinguish. And your dread of (*e.g.*) Mariolatry is one such hallucination. It looks like a terrible phantom, and it is only the play of shadows. . . . Remember that Neapolitans and Mexicans have their way of expressing devotion, and we have ours; and that a Church which really does visibly include all nations must include all tempera-

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ments. . . . Now it seems to me that we English people are almost bound to be insular in our ideas; and to feel that other nations are either irreverent or familiar or gushing, because they do not pray as we do. But I must confess I feel it an imperfection in myself to feel that. . . . That thought of yours about the insignificance of a soul, oddly enough, came to me startlingly strong yesterday. . . . But it won't do! To be made in the Image of God is to be *capax Dei*, and that means that God and the soul are the two great pivots of the universe.

"As regards what your friend said to you, I would like to say this. It is not, when once you get on this side, a choice between the Church of England and the Church of Rome. But the second is a Mother that asks all; there must be no other in competition . . . it is all or none. She must be the whole world, or nothing. . . . But the fact that your friend can say what he does, shows (unless I am . . . mistaken) that he has never heard that tremendous, insistent Divine Call at all. Ah! there is no question any more for a sincere soul when it is heard. That is why one is so confidently happy about good and learned men like him . . . that they simply cannot have heard that Call at all. They have only seen Her like a stranger, like one among

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other communions. They haven't seen Her eyes, and heard Her voice.

"I am getting rhetorical and lengthy. . . . Please forgive me.

"I know the *Eirenikon* well. Have you read Newman's answer in *Anglican Difficulties* (I think)? . . . As regards Papal Infallibility . . . it is all involved in *Thou art Peter* . . . 'gates of hell shall not prevail'; *i.e.* the Church founded on Peter cannot be corrupt in things of life and death: (viz. Faith and morals). If we believe that of the Church, *a fortiori* of Peter."

I had evidently now reached a stage which many converts may themselves remember, when I sought frantically in the *Eirenikon* and similar publications, for instances of sustained and apparently successful rebellion against the Roman See—or rather, what was twisted by the Protestant writers to mean rebellion. The case of St. Cyprian impressed me less than some others, which I had evidently inflicted on my long-suffering guide, for in his next letter he deals with two such instances, the details of which I have completely forgotten, but which I probably found in Littledale, or the *Eirenikon*. The first I omit, as it has really no bearing upon anything at all, except the captious spirit of the Protestant critic. The second I quote, to illustrate Father Benson's crisp and brisk methods of dealing with such "difficulties."

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(ix) "Fortunatus and Felix. (*a*) How do you distinguish an 'appeal,' and an 'application'? (*b*) Felix proves nothing. The fact that here in England I go to a Bishop for anything does not show I do not believe in the Pope!—but only that I think a Bishop is competent to settle it."

Looking back, it seems actually incredible that the case of "Fortunatus and Felix," whose conduct and history one has long forgotten, can really ever have mattered to one's soul! But a citadel, on the point of being taken by assault, neglects no stone which may serve to strengthen her fortifications. In this letter Father Benson refers again to the manuscript which I had recently returned to him, with my opinion upon it.

"You must not think it original!" he says. "It would be a fatal argument against it if it was. It is stated—I mean the theory—in full form in *Development of Doctrine*, and one or two other places—*e.g.* Mallock's book; and is found under other images in many writers. It all, of course, really is contained in our Lord's parable of the Mustard Seed.

"There are two kinds of minds. (1) Those who follow point by point through history, and trace out God's plan in that way: by

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details and dates and small facts—like a detective.

"(2) Those who go up on a hill and judge from the general lie of the country, and the main directions, &c., as to where God's Road, or Way of Salvation, lies. . . . Personally I trust (2) more. It is the way of the simple and the 'plain man,' and the 'wayfaring men though fools.' Since our Lord came to those folk I cannot believe that such an important question as the 'Church' depends on being able to read, and be subtle and historical. Or else the 'fool' is handicapped.

"So I hope, though I have got no kind of right to dictate as to the way God leads you—but I hope He will lead you by (2); and show you His Road, winding away, over hill and dale, dipping out of sight sometimes; crossing precipices, *but arriving;* and not make you go with a microscope on hands and knees."

Referring to a question of mine about the Orthodox Church, Father Benson says:

(x) "I only did not touch on that (in the *City Set on a Hill*) because I was dealing with the present-day aspect of affairs; and to all practical purposes the Eastern claim does not reach England at all."

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Alluding to a passage in a previous letter, he says:

(xi) "All I meant was that in a Catholic Church you must have all sorts. And Infallibility sits up there like a great Mother, every now and then saying: 'Stop! children, that's enough!'—or 'John, you're too rough.' 'Jane, you're too fastidious.' But Jane needn't necessarily for that reason play at cricket, nor John at dolls."

The next letter explains and applies what Father Benson meant by the two methods of arriving at the truth. The very patience and facility with which he answered questions, many of them ridiculous and futile, encouraged his converts to tax his kindness to the uttermost, though, I hope, never to presume upon it.

(xii) "I think the second [way] is the safest, because it is one that . . . children and simple people are as competent to travel as anyone else; but I fully recognise that historians and scholars, and all who are made that way are bound in conscience to satisfy themselves, and not to submit to the Church in bad faith.

"But, as I said, frankly I think your mind, like my own, is constructed on the simpler, and, may I say (?) more direct system. We are both deductive; we naturally look to principles first

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and details next. If I am right in that, then I suppose it is true that you are more likely to arrive at sound conclusions by following the deductive method. But again, if I am wrong . . . then of course you are bound to follow the other line, and I will most gladly do my utmost to deal on that line. . . . I shall hardly feel my forgiveness assured unless I receive an enormous list of minute questions in a day or two. So you may imagine how I shall welcome them."

Towards the end of October he writes:

(xiii) "I needn't try to tell you how thankful I was . . . to hear that light was coming, even though it is intense pain to lift one's eyes to it. . . . I feel more and more sure that the writer that will help you most is Newman. . . . In slow, patient building up of the image of Truth he is unequalled. He puts his stones slowly together, showing you each before he lays it, and you don't see what he is doing; and then on a sudden he stands aside, and shows you that what has seemed an ideal dream is a sober reality in the Catholic Church.

"Do state your difficulties about the Inquisition, and I will do my best to answer them. But I expect we are entirely at one on that point."

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The day I received that letter I went to my first High Mass, and heard my first Catholic sermon. It was on the Gospel for the day; and the preacher, a Benedictine, spoke of St. Peter's venture of faith, his casting of the nets on the other side of the ship, and the miraculous draught of fishes. That sermon was a long, long step on the Road of the Wayfaring Man. However, one's difficulties were not ended. I was then suffering greatly about the Inquisition! The notes which Father Benson drafted for my instruction I copy here *verbatim*.

(xiv) "The Inquisition. Everybody is agreed now, I suppose, that the old methods of the Inquisition are wholly indefensible, and alien to the mind of Christ. But it makes one more lenient to the persons who practised this indefensible system, to remember:

"(1) That the murder of souls is a greater crime than the murder of bodies; and that from this premise the medieval authorities (faultily) argued that, if it was lawful to punish 'body-murder' with death, and to keep civil detectives, &c., it was, *a fortiori*, lawful to punish heresy with death, &c.

"(2) That, strictly speaking, the secular arm alone punished, and inflicted secular chastisement; in heresy cases as in others. And that therefore the civil power was technically to blame.

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(Of course this does not excuse the ecclesiastics' connivance and encouragement.)

"(3) That in the days when Catholicism was the only guardian of morality, and other religious systems did not exist, heresy meant an influx of every kind of crime, in the long run; and the temptation therefore was great, to holy people, to use unlawful means for a good end.

"(4) That compulsion of a kind must always be used in teaching and maintaining religion; (*e.g.* education of children; legal penalties still due to blasphemy).

"(5) That barbarities were the general order of the day.

"(6) That in those days even heretics did not object to the fact of the death penalty for heresy, but only to the application of it in their own cases. (*e.g.* Calvin's connivance at the burning of Servetus).

"Nothing can excuse the Inquisition therefore, but it is easy to explain it. The Inquisition is still in existence to the extent that there is, I believe, a Congregation in Rome who still bear the name, and whose duty it is to enquire into the same kind of matters. But it is unnecessary to add that they do not use the same methods."

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This very explicit statement finally laid the ghost of the Inquisition for me.

On All Souls' Day, 1903, Father Benson went to Rome. The last two letters he wrote me before leaving are so beautiful that I regret I cannot quote them *in extenso*. I had told him about the St. Peter sermon, and the insistence of the preacher upon the necessity of a venture of faith, a leap in the dark, on certain critical occasions.

(xv) "All one can do is to state considerations by which the hesitating state of mind may perhaps be tested.

"(1) In every act of Faith there must be somewhere a leap into the dark. That, one may almost say, is of the essence of an Act of Faith.

"(2) One who is merely intellectually convinced must hesitate until the conviction has affected the will. Newman says somewhere that he 'knew' that the Catholic Church was in the right for a long while before he made his submission, but he did not 'know that he knew.' Is not that a very ingenious way of describing a very complicated psychological fact? For example, you seem to 'know' it; but only you can tell if you 'know that you know.' Until you do you are right to wait. But as soon as you 'know that you know' you must wait no longer. I should gather from your letter that

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you have not yet reached the second stage; but I think you are very near to it.

"(3) No one has the slightest right to say that a week or an hour or twenty years is 'not long enough.' God works variously. St. Paul knew at once; but he didn't 'know that he knew' till after three days of darkness and prayer.

"As regards Communions: I should say you are right in going on with them in spite of the darkness, unless you feel certain that they do not give you the Blessed Sacrament. . . . Complete darkness . . . doesn't really matter. The point is: Is the will aimed right? . . . I can't, I fear, feel with you that the possession of the Blessed Sacrament [in the case of a schismatic Church] would be sufficient in any case. The Arians had It, and the Donatists, and nearly all heretical sects, at least, for a time. It is, as you say, much more a question of jurisdiction. You see, if Peter is the foundation all jurisdiction must spring from him; and even if the Church of England had preserved undoubted Orders, and every Catholic doctrine and practice, and produced saints and martyrs by thousands—if she had not that one thing necessary, the Authority of the Holy See, all—I do not say falls to the ground—but all is on a shaky foundation, and must fall sooner or later, or be reconciled to the

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seat of power and stability. Yes! I agree that the Royal Supremacy is a tough matter; though I have never seen it till lately. Unless the jurisdiction which had been the Pope's was shifted to the Monarch—well, words mean nothing. Hardly anything can be more expressly stated in the Acts of Supremacy. Do read them, if you can get hold of them. Read Elizabeth's. I have just been studying that period. It is amazing!

"As to . . . the scholars who live and die satisfied with the Church of England, all one can say is this: Since our Lord came to save the ignorant and wicked He surely must mark His Church in such a manner that it is as evident to the ignorant and wicked, as to the wise and holy. Otherwise there is a premium on learning.

"No. You and I, who have not had opportunity for great study . . . MUST be as capable of recognising the Church when we see it as St. Thomas Aquinas. Faith is a moral act, not an intellectual. . . . It is good to know that you went to see the priest after Mass." [This was the Benedictine preacher referred to.] "I feel as if just one finger of the great Mother is on your head now; and that you will soon put out your hand and take it; and then be in her arms."

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On the eve of his departure from England he writes:

(xvi) "I am as certain, since you ask me, that the step I have taken is the right one, and the one that I desire for every living soul—as of anything in the whole world. It isn't a question of hoping, or probability, or of anything short of the certitude of faith. The only puzzle about it, to me, is why on earth every one does not see it, too. I can't think myself back into the old frame of mind, any more than into a dream from which one has awakened. As Newman says: one's old theories and suppositions have faded like mist when the sun rises—fairy palaces—beautiful and exquisite—but enchanted! And now one is on the Rock, and the mists have gone. . . .

"It is a real happiness to think of being able to pray, at the tombs of the Apostles, for one's friends, and England. When I was there, eight years ago, I felt a stranger. Now, thank God! a child at home!"

Three days later the writer of these letters was in Rome; to return home, within eight months, a priest.

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## III

## LETTERS FROM ROME

THE most superficial reader of Monsignor Benson's books will be familiar with his descriptive style; but the difference between his books and his letters is very much that between a large, highly-finished picture and a rough water-colour sketch, slight, perhaps, in itself, but eminently characteristic, more suggestive in its incomplete perfection than even the finished study. Yet, again, some of these exquisite pen-pictures—such as that of the Holy Father's Mass—are tiny miniatures, perfectly finished with his own consummate and distinctive art. The greater part, however, are sketches; and the difficulty is, in such a portfolio—the brilliant impressionist product of a master-mind, colour and outline dashed in with no uncertain hand—to choose the most attractive, where all are beautiful. These Roman letters have at least this special interest for his friends: they give us his first impressions as a Catholic of the Eternal City, which he learnt to know so well in later years. Monsignor Benson's novels contain singularly few descriptions of Rome, though those in, *e.g.*, *Initiation* and *The Coward* may be said to compensate for this by their great beauty. Still, I cannot remember any such pen-pictures as those presently to be quoted, and



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I may perhaps say that their possession first inspired me with the desire to give certain of Monsignor Benson's letters to the world.

The day after his arrival at San Silvestro he wrote:

(i) "Rome is like a sort of sacrament of the New Jerusalem. You meet the four marks of the Church, incarnate, in the streets and churches. The Unity is visible; church after church precisely the same; with the Blessed Sacrament, like a beating heart, in each.

"And the Holiness is evident in the faces of the Religious and priests and children one meets, as well as the simple people at their prayers everywhere. And the Catholicity is evident.

"This morning I, an Englishman, knelt with Italians before an Italian altar, and heard a German priest say Mass, with a negro server from Africa!

"And you hear every language of the civilised world in the streets. And as for the Apostolicity, we know that SS. Peter and Paul died here and lie here: and that the successor of Peter, and the Vicar of Christ is here, in the Apostolic See, radiating unity of faith throughout the City and the World! It is marvellously 'good for us to be here.' The last time I was here I was out of communion with it all, and ran to my own church



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as to a sort of Zoar. I was suspicious and unhappy at everything. The goodness of God carries one off one's feet!

. . . . . .

"I so much wonder how all is going with you; and whether you are seeing more clearly yet. I wonder so much how your talk with —— —— went off. . . . Even from my point of view, however, it is perfectly natural that God should raise up saintly souls like his to do the very peculiar and delicate work that is to be done in England; and of course, too, He must permit them to be in perfect peace and confidence as to their position, or they could not do the work. But for us who have heard the Call it is very different: to be ill-at-ease is one syllable of the Divine Message, and to receive the full certitude of Faith is the whole Message.

. . . . . .

"Meanwhile I enclose a picture of [the Holy Father]. He preaches to the people once a fortnight, you know, in the Vatican Garden. —— —— went to hear him; and says that his simplicity and tenderness are indescribable: like a very holy parish-priest talking to his people.

. . . . . .

"I went to St. Peter's yesterday alone. But it is indescribable! . . . I pray continually that

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you may see light fully and clearly. It is all so easy and coherent when the last mist rolls up.

(ii) " May I first wish you every possible happiness and gift from God; and above all the great gift that I feel so sure is coming down to you from ' the Father of Lights.'

" Since you want more about Rome, let me tell you about Sunday. We went to hear the Pope preach. It was in a huge courtyard; heavenly blue sky overhead. A great red canopy and throne had been erected against the end wall, on a platform, and two Swiss Guards were guarding it. The court and the windows and roof were filled with a crowd of 20,000—again of all nations of the world. And at last we saw halberds moving along the cloister behind, and the crowd began to sway and cheer; and then troops of prelates began to pour in; and last of all he came, walking, all in white—beaming, smiling, blessing, and waving his hand. Then he sat down, and there was a hymn sung by a choir; and then he preached in a loud voice, with gestures, and an extraordinarily fatherly, loving look in his face. . . . The enthusiasm was extraordinary. One felt that here was the fulfilment of everything; it was a sacrament of the Unity of

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God and the Body of Christ. . . . Nationalism is a poor thing beside that unity we can see here. One sees that Christ's promise has not failed; and that the Roman theory is the only one that makes it possible to believe that.

"However, when he had finished he intoned a kind of versicle, and everybody responded; and then he gave the Apostolic Benediction; and then rolled out a huge 'Amen' from the crowd. Then some one put a scarlet cloak and hat on him, and he stood there again, beaming out at us all, and the crowd once more went wild with enthusiasm, cheering again and again, as he went round the platform blessing and waving his hand, and long after he had disappeared. It was like a day of Pentecost. 'Parthians and Medes and Elamites . . . we do hear in our own tongue the wonderful works of God.'

"It is all a matter of *seeing*, not argument. It suddenly becomes apparent—emerges from chaos—and one wonders what in the world has been the difficulty. This emergence from theories to fact is an extraordinary experience. In the Church of England I took up theory after theory, ransacked books for supporters, and history for evidence; and now one has come out into a sort of sunshiny day, with a great many things perhaps as one would not have them, and many

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difficulties; but into Reality: with Christ's promises and kingdom made manifest.

"But I could go on for ever—and must not. Only it surely must be true that the simplest arguments are the best; and that the *evident* Catholicity, Apostolicity, Unity, Holiness, of the Roman Church are worth, a thousand times over, the *possible* Catholicity . . . of the English Church. There I felt as if *I* had to defend the Church against her enemies: *here* I feel that she defends me against mine.

"Another thing that impresses me enormously is the faith of the people. Yesterday I was kneeling for a few minutes before a statue of 'Our Lady, Hope of England,' and in three minutes, first, a young man came, knelt, dipped his finger in the oil of the lamp and crossed himself; then an old man came, said the Italian prayer for the conversion of England, and kissed the glass in which it was framed; then a third man came and prayed. Then I moved across to the life-size 'Pieta.' An old man came almost at once, moaning a prayer as he walked; held both his hands out with a rosary towards the group; got up, reached over and touched Our Lady's foot, and then kissed his hand. They were poor and middle-class people. In the evening I went to the gallery, where I was alone. Benediction was

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going on below; nothing to attract; *hideous* music, the continual creaking and groaning of chairs, no organ or choir; and a crowd of seventy or eighty people (just an ordinary week-night) and a breathless, rapt silence at the moment itself. The atmosphere of faith and worship was overwhelming; especially as it was so singularly unattractive from every physical point of view. . . . Yet [there was] this crowd, scattered in a great disorderly group, all adoring That which was in the monstrance in the little dim side-chapel. And that goes on night after night all the year round; and the church is not exceptional at all.

"Yesterday morning I went to see the Pope and Cardinals go into the Consistory: a crowd of some hundreds filled the corridor where I was, simply to see them go through it, twice, with half an hour's wait, standing up, before, and three quarters of an hour in between. The Holy Father walked, blessing as he went, with a great jewel on his finger, and his blazing cap and mitre, and the people shouting: '*Evviva il Papa*,' and a few Frenchmen, '*Evviva il Papa-Rè*'; but the Pope doesn't like that, and has forbidden it.

"Oh! I wish I could tell you better the *conviction* that one has! There are loads of things I dislike. . . . But as to the Catholic Church, there is simply no question at all. IT IS IT: and

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that is an end of the matter. It is incredible how little England is understood (and though it sounds arrogant to say so, one feels sure that the great work God has for English converts is to explain . . . what the Church of England has done and is doing). Yet Her claim is beyond doubt or question, when once one has seen it. Her people may be stupid, or money-grubbing, or ambitious, or vicious, or anything else that Her enemies say: but She Herself is the Bride of Christ and Mother of us all. . . .

". . . I shall remember you most earnestly on Sunday. Perhaps that day even God may give you the best birthday present you have ever had. I pray so."

I had been begged, by an Anglican friend, to ask Father Benson if the stories in the *Light Invisible* were true. It is a question which is still sometimes asked. Here is the answer:

(iii) "I am most grateful for what you say about my book. . . . As to the 'truth of the book,' I must explain how it came to be written. I had a large number of stories of things of that kind that were literally 'true,' and was proposing to make a book of them. I happened to mention it to a clergyman whose judgment I trusted, and he was so emphatic one had no

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right to make these things public that I gave up the idea: and instead of it I made this book of stories, none of which actually happened, but all of which, I think, I can parallel from facts; and some *elements* in many of them are actually true. Personally I hold strongly that 'spiritual fiction' is like any other 'fiction'; it is bound to contain things that either have happened, or might happen at any time. What I tried to do was to take things that I knew to be true, and represent them in a way that everybody could understand.

". . . I needn't say how thankful I am that you are so near the step into the full light. . . . It always seems as if God gave the corresponding compensation: the mere fact of being out in broad daylight, after twilight and glimpses and shadows (however homely and dear they are, and however much of God's own truth and beauty they contain)—that broad sunlight is the intensest joy. How hard it is to explain! But the metaphor of light and twilight seems the best, at least for my own experience. One is not frightened of shadows in the sunlight, because one knows what they are: but in twilight one is not certain that they are not monsters or pits or traps. For example, clerical scandals, apostacies, episcopal mistakes, hideous accessories of

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worship—all those things are *terrible* in twilight, and tempt one to doubt or coldness or depression. But in the sunlight they are disagreeable and lamentable, *but they are no more.*

" To-day I went to hear Mass, St. Cecilia's day, in the Catacomb of St. Callistus, where her body was found, resting quietly on its side. . . . Yesterday I visited her basilica and heard the 'In Organis Cantantibus,' her antiphon, sung magnificently over her body, where it rests down in the crypt below the high altar. Well, to-day we drove out early, about six miles, along the Appian Way; brilliant sunlight and blue sky; and the ruins and the cypresses and the colours and sounds were indescribable. Then at last we got there, saw the Trappists who guard it, and went down into the depths, about sixty feet; all the passages cut out, as you know, in the solid rock. There are at least five hundred miles of catacombs in Rome! On every side, as we went down, there were shelves filled with the dust of saints and martyrs. At last we got to her chapel; it was blazing with candles, and the roof was almost hidden by chrysanthemums and dahlias. A low Mass was just ending. It was, I think, in some ways the most extraordinary experience of my life. Certainly it has impressed me more than anything I have seen in Rome.

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To watch the faces of the huge crowd (there was hardly room for the priest and server) peering out of the gloom on every side; and to hear the same words and the same accent, and to see the same kind of faces, and all in the same place as in St. Cecilia's time—it was overpowering. The sense of continuity, and of the Communion of Saints and the Catholic Church was indescribable.

"And then the High Mass surpassed everything; a little choir sang Palestrina *exquisitely;* and three German priests in crimson were at the altar; and to hear all that going on under the stone roof, sixty feet below ground; and to know how the Christians, our fellow citizens, went through many of the same ceremonies in the same tongue, and adored the same Lamb sixteen centuries ago in the same place—all that had an extraordinary effect over us all. There was an American and an Irish priest with me, and they both felt the same. All the breathing and stirring stopped, and there was a silence like death as the bell tinkled; and the mingling of the incense with the flowers—well, it is quite useless to try to describe it! Then we went on, when Mass was over, through the passages and saw the frescoes of the Last Supper; and Jonah rising from the whale, and the dove of peace, and the IN PACE, on every side; and at last we

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came up again, up a long staircase down which one brilliant ray of sun poured ; up into the sharp, clear air, and saw Rome, three miles off across the country. Please God you will see it all yourself, one day. I am going to serve a Mass there one day soon, and, I hope, in a year or two, say one.

" Then this afternoon, I walked over to First Vespers of St. Clement in his basilica, and kissed a relic of his, and St. Lawrence and St. Ignatius of Antioch ; and prayed before St. Clement's body and the bodies of SS. Cyril, Methodius, and Catherine. Just imagine what all that means to one—their actual bodies in which they suffered and died ! . . . I enclose a leaf or two of the decorations of the Catacomb to-day : I picked them off the floor, and they have heard Mass there to-day too. . . . I prayed for you specially at Mass in the Catacomb, and offered my Communion for you again : as I am sure the crisis is near, and I do pray God, again and again, to be with you."

Another note on Indulgences :

(iv) " We do not know what a ' day ' means : call it *x*—an unknown quantity : one must use some measure, and the canonical day of penance is an obvious one. What it all amounts to is

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that every real spiritual effort we make (and our earnestness is guaranteed by fulfilling certain precise conditions of prayer), remits so much temporal penalty. It is only natural. A father might say this to his son: 'You need not attend family prayers; but if you do, you will have half an hour's less school; and if you attend twice a day, you shall have one hour's remission.'"

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception:

(v) "To-night, on this splendid Feast, I have just been down to the Church, and put a candle for you, as you wished, and I chose 'Our Lady, Hope of England,' where I have often prayed for you; and there it is, and will burn for you to-morrow.

. . . . . .

"This place is as wonderful as ever—methods of worship very startling to the English mind, but marvellous helps to faith when one begins to grasp that Catholicism means the inclusion instead of the exclusion of other religions. 'All things are ours,' since we are Christ's and Christ is God's. The way in which the dominion of Rome has passed from the temporal to the spiritual sphere is very striking. . . . The old temples are turned into churches, and the obelisks and columns

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crowned with the cross or a Christian saint; and even the old images consecrated to Christianity and re-baptized.

"But I could go on for ever; and I mustn't. . . . I shall be so anxious until I hear that you are safe, though of course I oughtn't to be. . . . Well—I know God has you by the hand; so why should I be anxious?"

With reference to some "smart and sarcastic" controversial tracts, Father Benson writes:

(vi) "I cannot *bear* these assaults on Anglicanism: although one feels that Anglican theories are quite impossible, and says so: yet bitterness in saying so seems to me quite detestable, and to do no good at all. . . . There is a good deal of comfort in the thought that Catholicism *includes* all that [Anglicans] hold (we know it if they don't), and that it is merely a question of time, in this world or the next, when they will hold it all too. To go from Anglicanism to Catholicism is an acceptance more than a renouncing. . . . Yes! I know what you mean about 'If all churches were like —— ——.' But then it would not be the Church of England! A church *could* not, I believe, keep up the standard of —— —— in all her parishes without being in communion with the Catholic Church. It is

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because she does not that one can recognise that she is only human; and that the foundation of the Rock of Peter is the only stable one. A succession of holy men can keep up the standard, here and there: but in the Catholic Church it keeps up without them!"

In the same letter:

"'Subjectivity' has, one might almost say, no more to do with egoism or pride, than being five feet tall has! It is a method of thought; and has, of course, its peculiar dangers, exactly as 'objectivity' has. It is a puzzling question, I think, as to how far one ought to develop one's method, whichever of the two it may be; or to develop what one *lacks*, in order to make oneself balanced. Roughly, one would say that imagination, intuition, subtlety, &c., are subjective; and that steadiness, practical ability, governing power, are objective. At least I think so. It is a fascinating study—psychology: I wish I really knew it."

This letter announces the approaching publication of *A Book of the Love of Jesus*. Father Benson says he is "delighted" about it.

"They are *beautiful* prayers and verses. You will love them, I think."

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On Christmas Day:

(vii) "The midnight Mass here (San Silvestro in Capite) was beautiful last night. Behind the high altar there is a door, about four feet high, opening into a tiny room where nuns used once to hear Mass. This room was turned into a stable, with a scene of clear sky and clouds and trees behind, and a wooden roof overhead, with creepers, and a little pillar of wall supporting it; and in front a great bundle of straw, with the Holy Child lying upon it with outstretched arms; and all in a brilliant suffused light. It was quite beautiful; and we had an orchestra and harp in the west gallery. This morning after High Mass the sun suddenly blazed out on the gold of the altar, and the Child lying in the doorway, and all the candles turned to a smoky yellow, suddenly."

One has seen that very effect a dozen times, but it needs Monsignor Benson to express it.

"Yesterday afternoon I went to St. Mary Major, and heard a part of Vespers, and saw the Cradle exposed in its glass and silver reliquary; and then went on to the Armenian Uniat Church, to Mass at 4 P.M.! It was all very odd, with barbaric music and rattles; with the words of Consecration sung out loud, and a white veil

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run across the altar suddenly after the Elevation, showing the officiants in a kind of mist behind: and then when it was withdrawn the priest was wearing a jewelled crown! But it gave one a great sense of Catholicity, and completely went against the idea that Rome wrenches everything to her own standard.

"It is really the best Festival of all, this, don't you agree? God coming to our level, whereas in all others we have to aspire to His! I suppose that is why it is the most popular. The Church here is still swarming with people, and tinkling with bells, at noon; continuously since I don't know what hour this morning. All the priests of course are saying their three Masses to-day; and the devotion of the people is beyond all description, especially, I really think, of the men, who form quite half if not more of all the midday congregations. Everyone gets his own chair and kneeler, and plants it exactly where he likes, at any angle, pointed towards any Mass that he likes. One suddenly finds people kneeling straight at oneself and beginning to hear another Mass; nearly all the faithful hear three Masses to-day. I was watching a well-dressed man this morning, with no book, but whose lips were moving quite incessantly; and another, rough-haired boy from the country absolutely rapt and

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motionless, kneeling on the stones, with his face hidden for, I should think, half an hour. The sense of worship is beyond anything I have ever dreamt of, out of heaven! Then this morning a boy followed me out of church, and suddenly took my hand and kissed it, as they do to priests here. I am *afraid* he wanted a Christmas present, but it was a touching way of asking for it!"

Father Benson went to Naples at Christmas-time. Lovers of his word-pictures will remember a phrase or two in one of his books, describing the piping of the shepherds before an ivory statue of the Mother of God, while across the bay, in the early morning, Vesuvius lay "all vast and violet" against a rosy dawn. Continuing the above letter there, he says:

"The Neapolitan religion is very wonderful; the most intense devotion, combined with very odd ways of behaving. I went out to Mass and Communion this morning, and people were praying in low voices during their Communion, and when they came in; and there were the most remarkable images I have ever seen—Our Lady dressed in blue silk, with a lace handkerchief in her hand!"

Father Benson had, evidently, not yet been to Mantua, where in the great Church of Sant' Andrea Our Lady of the Seven Dolours, still



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with a lace handkerchief, is dressed in a very elaborate tight-waisted black velvet gown, with diamond ornaments and a Medici collar!

In another letter from Naples, in which he is revelling in the thought of the whole creation, animate and inanimate, being caught up into and absorbed by the Catholic Church as a means of rendering honour and glory to the Divine Creator in beauty and splendour, Father Benson says:

(viii) "This morning there was a cat sitting upon the rails while Holy Communion was being given. No one paid any attention to it. It did not seem out of place. . . . Does that seem quite mad?"

(ix) "Now let me tell you more about Rome, as it all belongs to you now. First of all, this octave of services (Epiphany). We are having, as I think I told you, most of the Eastern rites here. They are very curious, and sometimes grotesque. There is an extraordinary custom of rattling long wands over the altar, with jingling heads to them, that comes from having to keep flies away from the Blessed Sacrament and the priest. In some of the rites the priest wears a kind of imperial crown after the Consecration; and in many of them Communion is given in both kinds. It is all a very striking illustration of the Catholicity of the Church: there is none

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of that crushing-out of individualism that the Church is so often accused of. There is a most wonderful Italian preacher here. . . . a most beautiful enunciation, very graceful gestures, and extraordinary passion; and the church is crowded every evening. I wish I could follow him, but I don't know enough Italian yet.

"[San Silvestro in Capite] is a beautiful church; I wish I could describe it. First, it is in the regular Italian architecture; and frescoed and gilded all over; with little galleries on the left, through the gratings of which we hear Mass sometimes; a long west-end gallery for choir and musicians; four chapels each side, and a very large foot-pace, with four or five steps going up to it, and the High Altar.

"It is very moving being down there in the early morning at Mass, and Meditation. . . . I always go inside one of the chapels, opposite the one where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, and where most of the Masses are said. It is quite dark, except for the lights; and the two or three Altars where Masses are going on; and one generally is present for at least three or four Consecrations, and for about two complete Masses, as they go on continuously from about half-past five to eight. Then the dawn begins to creep in; and more and more people come;

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and one sees them kneeling at all angles, many sitting, some standing, attending to different altars. They have an extraordinary power of remaining perfectly still without any book, apparently in deep prayer; one doesn't expect it, except of Religious, or of people who have had especial training; but I suppose it is the highest form of prayer to those who can do it. They seem to have got below the surface down to the silence of Grace; and Low Mass is exactly the worship that fits it and makes it fruitful. One feels that the whole world is a kind of restless, useless activity when one catches a glimpse of where those people's souls are. All the cries in the street, and even the expectation of hearing that war is declared [January 1904], and the English post—it all seems so external and superficial, because just down below, if one could only get there and stop there, there is reality. . . .

"But it seems to me that that is the place where we who are Catholics really meet one another, and the departed, and our Lord: and that Rome and Woodchester and our own homes and the whole world are just there, if we could only make one more effort and get there; and that the Mass that a priest says here is not another Mass, *but the same* as that which Father ——

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says in England, and that some unknown priest says in Australia. . . .

" Well, this is a dreary letter, I am afraid, but my only excuse is that I am not very well just now. . . . You know that it is not for want of a very deep happiness and gratitude in my heart, that I can't put it all down on paper. I must do my best to make up by thanking God more and more for the great grace He has given you."

(x) " It is so inexplicable to us, when we have had the great grace of entrance into the Church, how everyone else does not see it too—it is inexplicable, and that is the end of it; but just because we are so wholly certain of Catholicism, we can dwell on the common life in Christ which we of the Body of the Church share with those who are of her Soul.

" It does seem to me, more and more, that as soon as we have convinced our friends that we are whole-hearted and loyal in our Catholicism, we can, after that, dwell much more on what we have in common with them than on what we differ from them in. It is really horrifying sometimes to hear old Catholics talking of everything outside the Church as 'Anti-Christ'; and it seems to me that perhaps one of the greatest

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works we converts can do is to show old Catholics that our life outside the Church was real and Christian, though mistaken and imperfect."

(xi) "This morning I prayed for you under very exceptional circumstances, just after receiving Communion at the Pope's hands. We went to his Mass in his private chapel; about fifty people there. A little room opened on to the one where we knelt, with the altar in full view. He said Mass with such simplicity and humility, like a country priest; I needn't try to tell you how touching it was, and what it all meant to one; and this Sunday, a year ago, I was beginning a parochial mission at Cambridge! . . . There is little to describe as to the Mass. Imagine an immensely high room, hung with red damask and tapestry; folding doors, and a great gold altar just beyond, with a communion rail in front of it, and a holy, simple old priest with a ruddy-brown face, in a purple jewelled chasuble and white cap; and three officials in white and scarlet serving him: and a *dead* silence, except for the very soft murmur of a rather pathetic voice. He gave us all communion after his own."

(xii) "I am sending you two leaves—real Valentines—because they came from the Cata-

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comb-Chapel of St. Valentine on his day. (Please give Father —— one.) We went to hear Mass there, sung and performed by the Pallottini and their students. The catacomb-chapel opens by a door in the side of a hill: and the catacombs themselves open out in passages on the same level on the left: but these have been spoilt by Augustinians, who turned them into cellars—apparently not realising what they were doing. . . .

". . . I think [born Catholics] have an idea that most of the [Anglican] clergy preach a sort of Calvinism in a black gown; and that just a few silly young men put on vestments sometimes as a kind of 'joke'—behind locked doors. It does seem to me more and more that the first work of converts is to clear up this kind of misunderstanding. The conversion of England can never take place until England is understood. The whole position of High Churchmen seems to old Catholics utterly insincere; and that it cannot be held in good faith: and it becomes more possible to understand their mistake as one sees for oneself what a strange position it is. I read the Thirty-nine Articles again yesterday! and it does seem very odd how one could have signed them (as one did, and as thousands are doing to-day) in absolute good faith and sincerity. . . .

". . . Ash Wednesday was very touching at

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St. John Lateran—where I went out of pure love to *John Inglesant*, who 'received the sacred ashes there.' What a wonderful book that is as regards the inner life."

At Easter, Father Benson writes:

(xiii) "Here, there is so much to say that one doesn't know where to begin; but I suppose the chief thing is the Pope's Mass in St. Peter's.

"It was overwhelming! The whole church was cobbled with heads, and over that pavement came the huge canopy, with the great jewelled figure below it, and the solemn fans waving behind. That was one of the keenest moments. In front came an almost endless row of mitres moving along. Then the plain song was like one enormous deliberate voice talking, and every now and then shouting, in that enormous place. And then of course the final great moment was the Elevation, in dead silence, and only broken by the silver trumpets exulting up in the dome. It gave one a sense of an extraordinary consummation—the Vicar of Christ offering Christ, in the very centre of the world, with representatives of the whole Christian world there, and the angels blowing their trumpets overhead. One felt as if everything that was important or real

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was focussed there. And then the procession went out again in silence, with the trumpets blowing every now and then; and then out we went, too, and the whole piazza was one black crowd. Other things seem very small after that. . . . We have *scirocco* just now, and heavy thundery clouds, and a white glare over everything: most exhausting and trying to the temper. English people swarm everywhere, with red Baedekers under their arm.

. . . . . .

"The proofs of the book of Pre-Reformation Devotions have begun to arrive again: and it is such a joy correcting them: but I am terribly afraid that Catholics will not care for the book. It is too Saxon—such words as 'amiable' are not permitted for a moment. But I am sure you will like it. The devotions are an extraordinary mixture of passion and restraint, strength and delicacy. . . . This is a dull letter, I am afraid, but *scirocco* and mild feverishness are responsible. I tremble to think of these coming months of heat."

I wish it was possible to reproduce, in the text of the following letter, the delightful little sketch—of a Benedictine lay-brother with a long broom—which illustrates the original. It is about an inch and a quarter high, and absolutely true to

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life, in spite of the artist's own criticism. The letter is written from Sant' Anselmo.

(xiv) "—— —— and I are having the most delightful time—in this Benedictine Monastery—in Retreat. It is the best Retreat, so far, I have ever spent, even from the subjective point of view. There are no rules and no addresses, and we do exactly what we like, get up when we like, pray for as long as, and when and how and where we like, and it is consequently a kind of foretaste of Paradise. And the Benedictines radiate tranquillity and the Love of God, and have a sense of humour, and provide cold baths; and I really don't know what more one could want. It is a new monastery, very large, with a tall Abbey-Church, and an avenue of ilexes; and lizards; and blue hills in the distance, and vineyards all round; and great cool marble rooms and staircases. And they sing like angels, and their ceremonial is ideal. We had Pontifical Vespers this afternoon; and they did it as if (and indeed it is) more important to praise God well than to do anything in the world: and one felt that there was plenty of time and space. I had a gallery in the roof all to myself.

"There are some delightful lay-brothers here, like Gnomes (I have drawn the habit wrong, of course, but it gives the general impression), who

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do one's room, and beam all over: one of them brought up your letter this afternoon.

. . . . . .

"I feel I could retreat here for ever. Each one, properly speaking, is ten days: but I expect they will shorten the others; as thirty days' retreat in six weeks is rather long. But I don't mind in the least if they don't. . . . I have seen nothing so like Mirfield since I left it; and that was Heaven. . . .

"My first Mass is certainly going to be over the body of St. Peter. But dates are absolutely uncertain at present. I will let you know as soon as I know myself. . . . But the Italian way is to take a pinch of snuff, when they are asked anything, and to say: '*Fa' niente!* Time was made for slaves!'

"Your account of the French [Religious] and the *Salve Regina* is *most touching*. But how splendid it is that England *should* give them a refuge. It is a kind of reparation for Tyburn, and may bring immense blessings. . . .

"I am afraid old Catholics won't [like my 'Book of the Love of Jesus']. Their taste for English is wholly corrupted by modern Latinised prayers, full of words like 'amiable,' 'condescension,' 'fervour,' and so on. It needs to be brought up on the Book of Common Prayer to

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know what the English language can mean in prayer. But I hope that converts and Anglicans will buy the book. . . .

". . . This is a very unsuitable letter to write from a Retreat, I am afraid—what pious persons would call 'disedifying.' But I can't help that: I haven't time to write another."

Any comment upon these most beautiful letters would most certainly be "disedifying," though there is much which one's heart burns to say. But if Monsignor Benson ever, at any time, wrote a more moving description than that of the Pope's Mass in St. Peter's, at Easter, I, for one, have never seen it.

The letter from Sant' Anselmo was written in May 1904. Father Benson was ordained priest on the Feast of St. Antony of Padua, June 13; and after saying his first Mass, not over the body of St. Peter, but at the altar of St. Gregory on the Cœlian Hill, he returned to England.

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## IV

## LETTERS OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

It is manifestly impossible to sort into orderly heaps, each one of which shall deal with some special phase or need of the spiritual life, the bundle of letters which lies before me as I write. Often two or three subjects are dealt with in the same letter. Neither would it serve any purpose to quote them chronologically.

I can think of no better plan than the simple one of taking the letters as they come, and quoting from them without comment, and with little, if any, attempt at arrangement. For, indeed, they need neither arrangement nor explanation.

In answer to a question about Heaven:

(i) "It seems to me we have to think of it all like this: Because we are finite we have to express to ourselves the Infinite in finite ways. These finite ways are not adequate to what they express; but so far as they go they are perfectly true. Things like human affection, therefore, are really only shadows of Divine Love; but they are true so far as they go, and have the nature of Eternity in them.



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"Therefore it is perfectly true to say that they will last; but they also point to things so infinitely higher that we cannot imagine them. . . . Things will open and broaden to such an extent that it is useless to try to present them to the imagination. But we are perfectly safe in believing that not one single tender detail of earth will be lost in Heaven. It will all be there; it will be changed, too, as a seed changes into a flower. It seems to me that we shall just stare at one another and laugh in Heaven, for at least 'the space of half an hour.' . . . We must just leave bye-products alone. We haven't time to attend to them, nor the necessary knowledge: but God has. . . . Only we may be certain that no soul is lost except by its own deliberate fault. We are wholly alone with God."

The following letters, spread over a period of many years, deal with various aspects of exterior and interior suffering:

(ii) "Diagnosis:—a bad attack of 'This-Worldliness.' You have been, without the shadow of a doubt, indulging your imagination recklessly in plans for this world; dwelling on things that either are impossible or entirely unsuitable; and Almighty God, exactly as I should expect, has been leaving you to yourself

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in consequence to brood over what you very properly call 'cinders.' What these things are, you only know. . . . Whenever one does that, one suffers for it badly. One is only allowed to make one's ridiculous little plans in peace so long as one says every instant, 'Nevertheless not my will.' . . .

"There is only one remedy . . . but it is an unfailing remedy if one will apply it courageously; and that is to wrench oneself free, continuously and brutally, from all the material points, whether persons, places, or things, round which one's imagination has been circling. One must do this both interiorly and exteriorly—always and everywhere. One must deliberately exercise one's imagination upon the absence of those things—*e.g.* if you like writing, you must go on accepting in imagination the fact of not writing, until the acceptance is real and sincere. You must also deliberately not write sometimes when you might. And when you are prevented, you must embrace that prevention willingly.

"Now, when this is done the heavenly magnetism begins to act again; and while one is left, still, it may be, lonely and ineffective, one does not really mind. The heart begins again actually to apprehend heavenly things, and to touch them.

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"I conjecture also that you have enervated and weakened your spiritual and mental life by day-dreaming instead of strengthening it by meditation. . . . Somewhere or other in your imagination you have got an idol—perhaps it is the idol of a scheme-of-life. . . . And in your solitude you have been worshipping it with all your might. You must knock that idol down instantly, and never go near the pieces again.

". . . Now, I am absolutely confident that this is true in outline. I'm not sure of the details, of course. But you know them. And I am absolutely sure that those remedies are unfailing if you will apply them. Remember that without any outward act or word at all, complete deterioration may set in in the inner life, through an undisciplined or perverse imagination. You have therefore to reform the imagination, and tame it by starvation and hard work under the disciplinary lash of the will. Then the sun comes out again.

"God help you to do it."

(iii) "I do wonder whether, conceivably, you may not be meant to be at home for awhile. What do you think? Do you think there may not be a piece of work to be done there that cannot possibly be done by any one else? Have

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your people got any chance of coming across Catholics other than you? . . . May it not be just possible that you are intended to inform people who do not know in the least what the Church is? . . . Never . . . begin the subject —always . . . make the best of Protestants— never . . . be ruffled or . . . show impatience even in one's eyes—always . . . be absolutely fair and . . . insist on the good faith of others— and so on.

"As regards dying without a priest, being far from church, &c.—these things are not vital. But it is vital that you should do God's will."

(iv) "It appears to me that solitude is what you need: and I am quite sure that you are working out, unknown to yourself, all these problems and difficulties. I expect that the thing to do is to draw one more clean line across the page, and to say: 'That is past. I now have the whole of eternity before me—just as much as I had a year ago.'

"I know that you are remembering that our Lord has every single thread of your life in His Hands; and that He is going to weave something out of it that you do not know.

"Don't 'sit with the pain' too much. It is doing its own work. . . . Do not forget the im-



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mense and eternal joy that God has given you in this . . . friendship at . . . You have that for ever. Do you not think, perhaps, He desires to refine it and spiritualise it beyond all belief by this separation? It would have been terrible if it had been spoiled. . . . Let me tell you too that pain of this kind gives one a tenderness that nothing else can possibly give.

"So do use all this—as I know you are doing: and let God have His Way!

"God bless you always, and comfort you."

(v) "Please do not think for a second, as some people do, that Love is primarily an affair of the emotions. It is not: it never ought to be. It is an affair of the will: it is an act of choice. You can love a person deeply and sincerely whom you do not like. You can like a person passionately whom you do not love.

"Therefore seek for the cure in this matter in the will—by choosing God; by deliberately, internally, removing the will from [this friend] until the emotions have slunk back to heel. Then you can choose—again, keeping the whip well raised over the emotions. Try to stop them even whimpering. You can."

(vi) "What you should put before you, I think, is that your work is to build up in the

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minds of —— and ——, confidence in the Catholic Religion. These things are not done in a day, and of course, again and again they will say things that seem to show that they have none—and that even the foundation is not laid. But it is a work that can be done; and I am sure you must take it at present as being your business.

"Leave all things like Death to God. Nothing Eternal can possibly depend on an accident; and nothing except the Eternal matters.

"As regards all your physical discomfort and illness—well—humanly speaking, I am sorry as I can be: but from the other point of view the persistence of it all is so continuous and deliberate that there must be some particular object in view. What that is one cannot quite tell; but it is obvious that the way to meet it is to welcome it by sheer will:—and not even to 'day-dream' of escaping it. Indeed, there is some reason that will be plain presently.

"When one once begins to meditate on the will, and to try it, like a key, on every locked mystery, more and more doors fly open, and one sees all kinds of things that were invisible before. Faith, Hope, Love, Sorrow, Sin, Worship—all are ultimately solved by the will. That is on one side; and on the other the will has to hold to

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God's, and be identified with it. And the one completely perfect instance is the Incarnation up to the Passion."

(vii) "When things become, as you say, 'unbearable,' there is absolutely only one thing to do, and that is to grasp them, like spear-points, and guide them to one's heart. A cross that we cannot 'bear,' when it is laid upon us, is perfectly possible to 'take up'—and that is precisely what our Lord asks of us.

". . . Directly a thing seems intolerable, if one can but make a supreme effort of will, and grasp it, and hug it, and thank God for it—the pain becomes shot with joy. It is so, also, with the souls in purgatory.

"Now, cannot you do that, in this particular [Holy] week of our Lord's life? No man took His Life: He laid it down of Himself. . . . Remember that God is taking you seriously at your word. Is not that an honour?"

(viii) "I dare say you were quite right in leaving; plenty of things may have made it necessary. But it also seems to me possible, since I do not know the circumstances, that you would have done better to have stopped [where you were]. I don't think that unpleasantness,

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very hard work, and only occasional Mass are, apart from other things (such as grave risk to spiritual or bodily health), sufficient. But I dare say there was such a risk; and in that case, of course, you were perfectly right.

". . . Try to see whether there is any cause for your other unhappinesses that is remediable in yourself. Look at yourself critically with regard to the other places which were not, by God's Providence, suitable for you, and see whether there is anything resembling such things as impatience, or self-centralisation, or despair. I don't for an instant say that there was. Plenty of holy people have had quite as many discouragements without any fault of their own; and it may well be that God is trying you through external discouragement of this kind. But it may be that it is not so, and only you can supply the evidence. But it is no good my omitting to say this kind of thing out of tenderness for your feelings, if I am to be of the slightest use to your spiritual life."

(ix) " Here is another thing you won't like. Please detach yourself internally as well as externally from ——. I know it is fearfully hard: it means steady, reiterated, ruthless acts of the will. . . . I am perfectly certain that it is your

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only chance of happiness to get your heart under the control of your will. At present it isn't. Now, isn't that true? Do it in the large, not in the small way—blaming nobody but yourself—not giving yourself the relief of resentment, nor framing internal sentences to act as safety-valves—you know! . . . If you can master that in the way I suggest you will be far stronger than you have ever been. You will be able to make friendships with much greater security. It will increase incalculably your hold on God. . . . This all means loneliness for a time: it is the 'forsaking of wife and children and lands and houses' for Christ's sake: and the ultimate reception of them, back again, in this world, a hundredfold."

(x) "I didn't and don't in the least mean that you did not have a hard time; but what I did and do mean is that I think you should enquire of yourself whether you were at all responsible for it. . . . It seems to me probable that any one who has a series of intolerable positions to put up with must have been responsible for them to some extent:—not that it was simply 'their fault'—I don't mean that—but that they contributed to it by un-patience, or intolerance, or brusqueness—or some provocation. It seems to

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me possible that the incident of [which you speak] may have been the moment when you showed one of these things. . . . I throw out this as a suggestion. But it is only you who can say whether it was so. Do look back on all your intolerable situations, not to discern the hardness of other people, but—if possible—any mistake or defect that perhaps you showed. . . . No doubt it did become necessary for you to leave each; but the question is: Did any action of yours lead up to that situation? Are you conscious of having been to blame in the earlier stages?

" . . . I congratulate you on the reception into the Dominicans. They are a glorious Order."

(xi) " You know, I think you are a little apt to go from one extreme to the other. With that old lady whose name I forget, and with ——, you seemed to me rather to oscillate between, saying: 'I have been brutally treated,' and 'I am no good for anything.' Now, both of those things are untrue, really. Nobody is perfectly tactful and considerate, always; yet they are not necessarily, for that reason, brutal; and neither you nor I are ever perfectly brave and resolute. . . . It seems to me that the mean is golden. On the one side, people never fit in perfectly with ourselves; and, on the other hand, we ourselves

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are practically always largely to blame when that is the case.

"These are simply general remarks, please observe. . . . But I think when one has suffered a series of reverses, one is not justified in treating each only on its own merits; one must take the series as a whole, and consider whether there is any constant defect in ourselves which partly accounts for them—and then, quite simply, as children of God, cure that defect."

(xii) "Don't be discouraged by what has happened. Take it as a humiliation that God has permitted to show you your weakness, and then begin all over again from the beginning.

"Now another point. Please don't allow yourself to say, even to yourself, that you are uncomfortable. To do that means to make an atmosphere round you which makes things inevitably go wrong. One's tendency is always to think that one's discomforts are exactly those which are peculiarly intolerable. Rouse your sense of humour and see that! Above all, please remember again and again that God wishes to draw you into a peculiar intimacy with Himself; and that He has therefore put you in a place where there are no positive distractions, only negative ones. You were worsted, you must

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remember, when He did allow positive distractions. Don't be worsted by negative ones, too! This is surely quite plain: one doesn't often see Providence so plainly! The fact that you don't feel drawn to —— is a good sign of this. So, too, with religious emotions. Oh! remember that they are not God! . . . I am really thankful that He has put you down in a flat country, with flat emotions and flat people and a flat heart. He is giving you your chance that way, as the other didn't succeed.

"Please don't answer this—and take that as another flatness, too. We are always thinking that God is only Up: remember that He is also Down. Don't aspire, if you can't; but go right down and find Him there. 'Lift the stone and thou shalt find Me: Cleave the wood and I am there.'"

(xiii) "I should entirely leave off arguing about trifles as well as about religion. It is no good. And do not let yourself be tempted to answer by the thought: 'Unless I speak they will continue to hold a misconception.' Remember that they will continue to do that anyhow. I know that kind of character perfectly. It is no good. They do not need information; but a much simpler thing—grace. One must

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just shrug one's shoulders and let them go on: and meanwhile keep the channel absolutely clear between one's own soul and God, and one's own soul and theirs. And for the rest, take every sneer and plant it carefully like a thorn in the middle of one's heart, saying: 'This is certainly deserved; if not for this particular thing, for something else.' But what one is always tempted to do is to say: 'My God, I can accept anything but this. I know I deserve hell, generally speaking; but not this sneer in particular.'

"And above all, do remember that sordid squalor was part of the Passion."

(xiv) "Then why not consider once more my suggestion that God made you for Himself exclusively? . . . I think what you are doing is to try to put people in His place. . . . Will you make meditations for a week on [a quoted] sentence in your letter? If you think you wrote that in haste, or with deliberate exaggeration—I dare say you did. But it shows, anyhow, doesn't it—to what logical end you are drifting? Now I am not writing as sympathetically as I feel, because I know what a deadly thing this kind of thing may become: and because vivid and sharp pain is the only cure. But pain is of no use unless you inflict it on yourself. This is

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what I want you to do: deliberately to break down this golden image, and to stand waiting in the wilderness for God again.

". . . You want the light from our Lord to shine on people you love, and make a heavenly atmosphere; but you don't want, at present, to look at the Source of the light, alone."

But spiritual direction—and correction—was only a part of the wise and patient guidance given, so generously and tenderly, for many years. Scarcely a letter without practical counsel and advice about temporal, every-day matters. These, of course, are obviously not matter for quotation here. I cannot, however, refrain from copying the following—relating to the treatment of a nervous hypochondriac.

(xv) " May I suggest that the one fatal thing—or rather the two or three—in dealing with people with nerves are: (1) Ever to 'answer back.' Simply say nothing at all. Refuse to argue or even speak while 'nerves' are in the air. (2) Ever to show the slightest concern at such things as a refusal to eat. Be simply dispassionate and detached. People with nerves love to sway others. Don't be swayed. Shake yourself, mentally, as a man caught in an avalanche. You can only do this by having a very real religious life of your own. Continually shrug your mental shoulders, and go your own way.

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" As for sharp things said, shame yourself into not minding. You wouldn't mind if they were said in delirium. Well, they are.

" I think this is all I can offer as a contribution. You must put it into the cauldron and let it mix up with the rest, and then see what kind of a calf comes out. Above all, for goodness' sake, be DELIBERATE, whatever you do."

But even the letters which, on first opening them, seem to be entirely filled with advice (greatly needed) on temporal matters, contain each at least one sentence—perhaps only a tiny phrase—which throws a supernatural light on the most matter-of-fact details; or a scrap of description, like the frontispiece to a book.

Speaking of the prayers which had been promised him by a Religious who had received for her convent a copy of the *Book of the Love of Jesus*, Father Benson writes:

(xvi) " Such prayers are like wings: please add some more feathers."

In other letters:

(xvii) " You know one's feelings really are unimportant. As soon as you see that you will be so happy. I believe it is the keystone to your arch, and that it isn't yet in its place."

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(xviii) "I am sure you are putting yourself into the Hands of God; and that is the only thing that matters."

(xix) "[To be peaceful and quiet] is more worth while than anything else. We can neither know nor do the will of God if we are fretful and upset."

Speaking of a choice between several openings:

(xx) "God gives His people an *embarras de richesses* sometimes—that they may learn to refuse as well as to assent."

(xxi) "When Providence takes matters into His own Hands, and withdraws and refuses means to do what one wants, there is an end of it: and it is a great comfort."

Here is a delicate water-colour sketch of Cambridgeshire, at the end of March:

(xxii) "This country has an extraordinary charm of its own, I think. I went to —— on a bicycle to-day . . . through miles of flat country, with an enormous vault of blue sky and white clouds overhead, and a racing wind, and things like almonds and japonica out here and there—a most exhilarating day."

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Such a paper as this might be continued indefinitely, so rich is the material from which one can draw. This is impossible; but the following letters, at least, cannot be omitted. Most of us, probably, know what it is to suffer from depression, nervous or spiritual—a depression which, if indulged, may develop into actual morbidity. For a certain type of subjective soul it is a very real danger both to mind and spirit.

(xxiii) "And now about . . . the fits of morbidity. Fr. —— was preaching here last Sunday, and something he said struck me immensely. (He has a wonderful power of making truisms fresh!) It was on the Lord's Prayer: and he showed that since it is the model of prayer we must follow it. Its system is that before we ask anything for ourselves we have to look up at God—in the first three petitions. Then he said: 'Nine times out of ten, by the time we have really prayed the first three petitions we either forget ourselves; or we are willing to bear the trouble; or it has been removed.' May I recommend that? In your prayers and meditations and communions dwell on God's Name, and Attributes and Kingdom, and Will; and leave yourself out. It is the brazen serpent once more. Just do the necessary work as regards your actual sins; and then leave them. . . . God means you to lose yourself and escape from yourself in

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Himself and His children. All you say about an increased acuteness in hearing and seeing God in nature seems to me an additional indication of all this: and that the reason you are suffering is because you want to cure your soul in your own way instead. Do give yourself up to this! Make your meditations on God direct. Put yourself among the Seraphim and look at Him. Forget everything else for a while; and find Him in Nature and work, and let yourself vanish."

(xxiv) "I am really sorry for writing as I did about my life here. I hadn't at all realised what yours was like; and the dreariness of it, externally. I wish I could say something; but what can I say except what would be threadbare by now—if that were possible—of the marks of the Cross? And with nerves it must be nearly intolerable. Personally I believe that *the* cure for nerves is an attempt at contemplation. I hope this does not sound absurd. But it seems to me that the one thing that does cure that maddening soreness of spirit that we call nerves is to *sit still*, in body, mind, and soul, and exclude every thought but that of God as He is in Himself. But it is foolish to say all this. . . . Perhaps too you have not much time to sit still bodily. I do

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think, however, that the remedy lies in that immense effort of cessation of effort. I wonder whether you ever take attributes of God, and set them before you, excluding everything else: saying the word—*e.g.* PEACE; over and over again—and then imaging it in a quiet sea, a space in air, a summer garden, and so on. . . . For people with strong imaginations I do believe it is often infinitely more useful than elaborate 'points,' and 'resolutions,' and 'bouquets.'

"I cannot tell you how sorry I am you are having a depressed time. I am doing my very best for you, and said Mass for you this morning. But frankly, I should have been very much surprised if, under the circumstances, you did not have a good deal of temptation that way. It is exactly like the convalescence of the body after an operation. You have had the fiercest of all operations in the cutting of so many ties; and your soul has to lie still in a strained position, until our Lord heals it. So I do not feel any dismay at it, although all the sympathy that my poor little soul is capable of."

The following letter, written at a difficult crisis, has always seemed to me as one of the most perfect messages of encouragement which a soul acutely conscious of continued failure could possibly receive:

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(xxvi) "You have got on the wrong road, somehow. I think it is what I said to you a good while ago—that God means you to be lonely and you don't want to be. . . . Don't bother about the past. We all make mistakes. . . . Thank God that you have learnt [a real lesson] instead of lamenting over the fact that you had not learnt it previously.

"To sum up, then: Don't bother yourself. You have the whole of eternity, after all. This is only a rehearsal, with the Prompter continually saying, '——, you didn't do that right! Do it again, please.'

"Look forward rather to the night when no man can work; but when he can enjoy what he has learnt during the day. And may the 'Prompter' bless you always."



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## V

## TO ONE BEGINNING A LITERARY CAREER

PROBABLY more than one contemporary Catholic writer has been encouraged to perseverance and an ultimate measure of success by Monsignor Benson's generous help and advice, never withheld, at whatever cost to himself. Others, perhaps too unselfish to trouble him for counsel and criticism, may be interested to learn from these pages a few of his own methods of teaching a beginner.

The first letter, written many years ago, refers to the first article I published; revised by him, as was indeed everything I wrote for several years, by his own wish.

(i) "Here is the paper. I thought it best to send it back to you as there were a few criticisms that certainly need your consent. But I have written to ——, warning him of its arrival.

"I think it excellent—skilful and moving. As I said I would do, I have only criticised it from your standpoint, so to speak. It is never the slightest use to attempt to make a paper which expresses the character of its writer, express the



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character of another writer. Therefore, although there are phrases that *I* should not use, that would only be because they would not harmonise with my manner. These I have left untouched.

" Won't you spell ' Saint,' *St*, not *S* ? "

The following, written about the same time, refers to a letter of my own :

(ii) " Your description is beautiful. I wonder why you don't write—really, as a kind of profession. I feel sure that you could. If you are at all drawn to it, I should be happy to give you the benefit of my very small experience : and the first thing I would say is, Prune your reading, and read what you do read with an eye on the style, and as to why certain things are effective—*e.g.* epithets, gaps, rhythm. I should read *no* magazines *ever*—no, none. And never leading articles. I should use Latin devotions in preference to English—for English Catholic devotions are really lethal to style. I should also, quite deliberately, read a novel of Stevenson's, continually at odd times ; any Ruskin you can find. . . . Well, so on. Then, slowly, I should keep an extremely careful diary, regarding it as the public would regard it. . . ."

I make no apology for publishing what has always seemed to myself, and obviously to others,

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Father Benson's extraordinarily generous view of one's first feeble attempts at authorship. Many, who deserved it better than I, have doubtless received the same kindly encouragement. Supreme artist himself, he was great enough to see the merits of a painstaking piece of work, or of a few pages of mere description, before its obvious faults. And his artistic sympathies showed him that to praise the merits was the surest way to help a certain type of beginner, keenly conscious of shortcomings of all sorts, and intensely aware of his own mistakes.

At the same time, criticism was always forthcoming when necessary; but it was criticism that stimulated and spurred, not depressed and annihilated.

(iii) "Now as to the article: (I shall neither flatter nor spare, but say the simple truth as I believe it).

"Without the slightest doubt you have got the 'seeing eye' and the power of expression. These are the only two things that matter in the least. All the rest is simply technique and hard work. Without these ('eye and hand') technique and work are useless.

"But you want lots of hard work. First, generally, you must read carefully and *intelligently*, and only the best authors. Don't corrupt your taste by anything else. Avoid third-rate novels like poison; read first-rate novels greedily. And above all, read Stevenson again and again;

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and a certain amount of Ruskin, Walter Pater, and Newman. These are *the* people for style.

"Next, you must carve and re-carve for the present—being perfectly willing to go over a MS. again and again in all moods, especially in the moods when you feel alert and intuitive.

"Next, you must write *a lot*. I should strongly recommend a diary of description—putting down tiny phrases too at odd times; tiny similes; perfect epithets. (Consider this simile of Stevenson's. A man hiding in fear of his life behind sandhills sees a windmill turning its sails beyond other sandhills '*like some foolish person holding up his hands.*' Do you see the gorgeousness of that? Yet every word is absolutely common.)

"Now your paper in particular. You say many beautiful things beautifully. But here are some criticisms.

"(1) You use sometimes the conventional words instead of the exactly right words. You describe distant plains as green. They are never green, except once in a hundred years. If you mean green you must draw attention to that fact.

"(2) Your article is the wrong 'shape.' Tennyson once said that a poem was like an apple-rind, curving in a particular kind of way, ending in a final kind of way." [Here follows a little drawing

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of an apple-rind.] "Do you see that? A picture, too, must have a focus. Your paper hasn't a focus: it is a yard of canvas painted beautifully; but there is no reason why it should stop at a particular moment. The remedy for this is to shape an outline first.

Introduction.

Point I (bang), flowing out of this
is Point II (bang), and thence
follows Point III (BANG!)
with a kind of ripple flowing away into silence
(if it is of that kind).

"(3) You repeat yourself too much. For example, you let your climax—Bethlehem and Calvary—peep out too noticeably, too soon. You must remember that a reader is thinking as he reads. When I read of the crucifix I saw your climax full-armed: you shouldn't have let me do that. You should have said that the screen was there with half-seen gigantic shapes . . . and then passed on like lightning to the altar and Bethlehem. Then you should have made me look up again and see for the first time the Cross and the Blood.

"(4) Touches of humour enliven a description, of course. But be *fearfully* careful. For example, the 'insecure ladder' on which the

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novice is standing is *literally* irreverent. One sees in an instant a novice tumbling from it in a halo of white habit and green leaves—whereas your note there is peace and security!! So too in lesser degree with your muddy road in the valley. One isn't thinking of the muddy road at all, but of the peaceful valley.

"So too again two or three times you are too reflective in the wrong place. You are like a person who is pointing out a snow-peak and then says: 'Isn't it extraordinary to think that that beauty is caused by a mixture of $H_2O$' (or whatever it is) 'at a certain temperature?' Do you see what I mean?

"Now of course I have exaggerated all those points violently—underlined them in red pencil. What I recommend is this. Put this MS. instantly into a drawer. Take paper and pencil and write down a skeleton on this subject, with points and sub-points: so that it makes a curve and ends inevitably. Then write a first paragraph. Then take the MS. out of a drawer, take it to pieces, and fit it into the skeleton.

"I dare say lots of papers would take the MS. as it is; I dare say after correction they won't. But they would be entirely wrong in both cases; and you will be right. And that is what matters in a literary life.

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"Now if I didn't think *highly* of your powers I wouldn't say all this. I would say instead, perfectly truthfully, that it is beautiful; that some paper certainly ought to take it, and that I congratulate you.

"The books I recommend first are:

*Kidnapped. Master of Ballantrae. Across the Plains.* (Stevenson.)
*Marius the Epicurean.* (Pater.)
*The Apologia.* (Newman.)
*Sesame and Lilies.* (Ruskin.)

"Finally, do study alliteration, both of consonants and vowels. It is a trick, of course, and becomes a vice if you aren't careful. But it adds extraordinary polish if used in moderation.

"No—don't be afraid of adjectives, *so long as they are exactly right ones.*

"God bless you always."

Six months later Father Benson wrote:

(iv) "I do not see why God has developed in you a desire to write, and has given you success, unless He means you to do something with it. Of course He *may* mean you to sacrifice it; but one has to have strong reasons for thinking that, and I don't see them."

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(v) "A hundred congratulations. I am so glad. A Pen-Name is a hard thing to think of. I think —— is as good as anything. It is interesting, somehow."

(vi) "I think this is very touching and beautiful: the descriptions are exquisite, and gain enormously by being set into a *shape*.

"Two comments only:

"(1) I should say 'I' instead of 'one' as often as possible.

"(2) I should lay stress all through on your sense of leaving home and feeling strange: and on your perception that Catholics are at home everywhere. A sentence or two would do it.

"Such a hurry. God bless you."

The next letter is dated nearly a year later.

(vii) "An idea has come to me which I may as well suggest—about your writing.

"Mere scenic writing is not popular, though people love it if it is illustrative of a story. Now why don't you try a novel of which a large part is laid in ——? I don't mean that it is to be autobiographical, actually, but that it should follow the lines that you know.

"The first thing is to get the central character and the development. . . . The next thing is to

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plan the book. Take, for example, three 'parts.' Each part must have a *theme*, and must have a defined end—a step forward in character or circumstances. . . . Then you must take extraordinary pains with the side-characters, and weave in small developments in them. They too must progress; not merely be straw-people who are moved about to bring out [the heroine].

"Or again, you might weave the whole thing on the frame of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil.

"*But the important thing in a novel, as in a sermon, is to have an object so clear that it can be described in one sentence.* It must be a 'curve,' not a strip. You will find this gives an extraordinary vividness and significance to backgrounds. You need not trouble about them; you will do them admirably without any trouble. What you will have to take extreme pains with is the 'curve' and the characters. You must not, as all of us are tempted to do, label characters, especially side-characters, as 'villain,' 'adventurer,' 'dévot' . . . *because all characters are mixed.*

"If you do it you must first make your scheme —the three parts—the chapters. Each part ends with a moderate 'bang'; each chapter with a

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smaller 'bang'; each paragraph with a tiny 'spit'; the whole thing with a *loud* 'bang.'

"Another thing you must guard against is too much pictorial religion. That is a temptation for all with liturgical minds. If you care to do this, and to send me the frame, I shall be charmed to criticise. I am quite sure you can write. I think this *may* be the solution. Authors have a real chance now [1907] if they happen to hit the target; and there is lots of money to be made."

To a suggestion I made regarding this advice, Father Benson replied:

(viii) "When you do your scheme, will you draw it out in printed handwriting—very *terse*, *e.g.*:

"Chapter I. Jane at home. General situation and characteristics.

"Chapter II. Jane meets John. John's characteristics.

"Chapter III. John's meditations. He goes for a walk. . . .

"I don't like your end. . . . People will see it coming and will snort. Leave her in the country, with a garden: and him dead. (This is only the vaguest suggestion.) And leave her serene and supernatural. And *please* don't for

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an instant ever run Divine Love and human love into one. (Yes; there is a retort to that; and another to that.) But that is what I think."

(This letter, which goes on to deal with private matters, concludes: "I have written this between preaching and supper; hence its didactic and discontented tone.")

I have omitted all the finely-wrought details in the above scheme; for, as the novel in question, though written and rewritten, has not yet seen the light of day, it would be unfair to oneself, as well as impossible for another obvious reason, to do otherwise. Publishers, unfortunately, were more difficult to convince of the merits of unknown writers than was this generous Master of his craft!

Some months earlier, when I was about to travel to places and among people of rather unusual interest, Father Benson had renewed his advice to me to keep a diary. It was to be written for a circle of friends, who had asked to see it; it was to be descriptive, and illustrated with sketches and photographs. Above all it was to be "the right shape. *Not* a flat exercise book," he begged; "they are so depressing." It was to be a thick, oblong volume. I found exactly the thing in a shop in Cambridge, and he gave the blank pages his *Imprimatur!* I was to send it first to him; and I mention this in order to explain the next letter.

(ix) "First I want to congratulate you more than I can say upon your diary. It is simply *admirable.* I read it straight through, absorbed:

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I read extracts to Father ——, who roared with delight, aloud, again and again.

"Do you know I really think it would make a book very nearly as it stands? I am no longer in the least doubtful as to the *one* thing I did doubt about—viz. your delineation of character. But you have got it! even in your smallest touches. —— and —— and —— are all alive.

"Now please consider this:

"Will you think over a slight story and then work it into the diary? I think it should be a trifle tragic, as a foil to the humour." (Here the plot—a delightful one—is outlined at some length.) "It will be a *poignant* book.

"You would have to write a careful preface and an epilogue, and edit the diary. But the mass of the book can stand as it is. If you agree, then please let me deal with a publisher for you. If you are in doubt, will you let me send a volume of the diary first to a publisher for his opinion—or better still, take it with me to-morrow week when I lunch with one? . . . It is really difficult for me to believe that your book won't be a success. Of course I may be wrong. Things are fearfully subtle on the publishing point. But that is my opinion. The sketches and photographs will have to come out."

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But again the publisher was hard-hearted! Father Benson, enclosing his letter, wrote:

(x) "Be prepared for a disappointment. Here is ——'s opinion. I told him what I thought, and asked for a perfectly candid judgment. It was silly of him to think that you meant to publish the diary practically as it stood. I was quite explicit with him.

"Now the question is, what do you think yourself? You have an expert's opinion. Do you think that a story on the lines I have suggested is in your power? *The* point, as I see, is Construction. All depends upon that. And I haven't the slightest idea whether you have that gift or not. Certainly you have the gifts of description and humour. But those, according to this opinion, are not sufficient. . . . You must decide. . . . I am overwhelmed with work. God bless you."

One thing will surely strike even the least sympathetic reader—the generous unselfishness shown by one of the busiest men in England as to the affairs of a perfectly insignificant person, whose name as a writer was practically unknown. Father Benson at that time was at Cambridge. Not only was he preaching regularly every Sunday—sometimes twice—to say nothing of his enormous correspondence, and the daily increasing number of personal calls upon his time, but he

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was writing one of his best-known books, *Lord of the World*. The mental and physical strain can be imagined. Yet he found time for everyone who needed his help.

It was in the little room at the end of the passage, in the Catholic Rectory, Cambridge, that he gave me many an unforgettable lesson in style and construction. I was writing a book—not the novel—which appeared shortly after. As I wrote, he read the chapters, and criticised. Sunday night, after his sermon, between Benediction and the Rectory supper-time, was the hour he usually spared me; and once, for some reason, supper was laid in the little room. "What," asked Father Benson, in the course of an instruction on the perfect selection of the adjective, "is, for instance, the difference between 'gleaming' and 'glittering'? You've got both in this paragraph, and I want to know how you differentiate." The supper-table, happily for me, supplied half the answer. "Silver—polished silver—gleams, and diamonds glitter," I ventured, for this was a serious matter! "Right," he said; "I just wanted to see if you knew why you used them."

The greater part of the instructions Father Benson so generously gave me were *viva voce*, and I shall not, naturally, attempt to reproduce them here. But the fact accounts for certain *lacunæ* in his letters upon this subject. One thing, however, I must say. With such a teacher it was a foregone conclusion that his pupil should be considered to have attempted to plagiarise him! If so, it was unconsciously. "What does it matter?" he asked. "'They say. What do they say? Let them say!'

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You and I both understand, and that is the only thing of importance. If the same words mean the same thing to both of us, it merely proves our minds are alike." He never seemed to understand or value his own generosity.

(xi) "If you get unpleasant letters," he wrote at this time, "I should burn them instantly, after one reading. I always do. It is the only way not to be distracted."

In the same letter he says:

"You must follow your own feelings throughout, and not take advice unless you honestly and absolutely agree with it. Otherwise the book will be patchwork."

A year later Father Benson sketched the following notes, which form a useful guide to anyone undertaking biographical work.

(xii) "What you need is a journey to a library. Then look out (the name) in a 'Dictionary of National Biography.' Then read through the article to get the general proportions, and make notes. Then write down:

"(1) The names of all biographies of him published since 1870.

"(2) The names of all *big* biographies (2 vols. or more) ever published.

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"Then, if the books are in the library, take out as many as you can, and read them all, fast, making notes. Then map out your own, by chapters . . . allotting incidents and characteristics to each chapter.

"Then begin to write, hard."

At the close of 1908 he wrote:

(xiii) "What is quite certain is that you are meant to write; and if that is incompatible with circumstances these must be changed. . . . I wonder what you will think of the *Conventionalists?* Personally I like it, if I may say so! I actually don't want to rewrite it. But I shall in a year, I imagine. Just now I am at the dismal labour of rewriting a dreary book on Charles II, which I loathe. It is the sixth time."

This book, of course, is *Oddsfish*, of which Father Benson wrote to me from Rome in the spring of 1904 that he was working at a historical novel on Charles II, but had been "advised for the present to keep it back." He waited, as we know, just ten years! It is this wonderful patience—the "infinite capacity for taking pains," the long delays in order that work may ripen—which is so eminently characteristic of his genius. And though no living writer has produced so much work of the same kind and



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quality in so short a time as he, his books never show signs of haste—a proof of supreme craftsmanship.

(xiv) "You will have to learn how to 'cut,'" he wrote in 1909. "It is a literary equipment as much as anything can be. One can *always* reduce if necessary. . . . Please sign no agreements without letting me see them."

Two other letters return once more to the novel, of which he never gave up hope. I think I may honestly say he was more interested in it than I, to whom it never seemed convincing.

(xv) "It is *excellent*. . . . The thing you will have to toil at is the framework and the story.

"My main criticism is that the *personal element* is not nearly strong enough. . . . I really think that a little hard, careful, absorbed work on this point might make the whole difference to the entire book. You have so much excellent stuff, skin and flesh and blood, that it is worth rebuilding the anatomy. At present it is evident that the love-interest is shoved in through the skin from outside. You *must* give the impression that the bones were built up first.

"You will have to cut—but *never* cut conversations. They are *Heavenly!*"

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A year later he said, at the end of a letter full of advice on literary matters:

(xvi) "Yes: my new book's out. It's called *None other Gods*. . . . I think it's going to do well, but I haven't yet had time to *look* at it in its published form. And I began yet another two months ago; and haven't *touched* it for six weeks.

"Don't mind about your feelings. Go on 'doing the Pieces,' as Father —— said; and say, 'Lord, Thou knowest how exceedingly busy I must be (and how exceedingly fractious I feel!). If I forget Thee, do not Thou forget me!' I say that CONTINUOUSLY, just now."

(xvii) "I daren't prophesy about [your novel]," he wrote some time later. "I am clear (*a*) that it is a good book . . . (*b*) that it is worth working at and publishing. But as to whether the B.P. will rally round it in their thousands I haven't an idea. *I don't think you ought to incur any . . . expenses on its security.* It would be a real gamble. Gambles sometimes succeed, but that doesn't justify them. That's what I think."

It is impossible to quote more of these delightful letters. But enough has been said to show, in his own words, the sort of friend Father Benson was—even in temporal matters—to any

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one of his children who needed his help. No words of anyone else, however grateful, could have the same effect; just as no one else, however ready, could have helped in the same way. Yet, though one cannot take up a pen, much less begin to write, without remembering him—remembering his patience, his courage, his generosity to the correspondents, many of them strangers, who overwhelmed him with letters; remembering the long list of books he has left us, books at which, too often, he toiled with weary brain and wearier fingers; remembering, above all, his indomitable will, which carried him on to the very end: the infinite pathos of it all brings its own mystical consolation. No living writer has so given of himself in his books as Monsignor Benson: his learning and experience, his trained faculties of observation and description—*himself*—the very depths of his soul, the breadth of his mind, and the heights of his soaring spirit—he has given us all, and at what a cost? But his sacrifice is not in vain, for in the heritage he has left to us he, "being dead, yet speaketh."

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## VI

## TO ONE ENTERING RELIGION

THE following extracts from Monsignor Benson's letters to one of his converts desirous of entering Religion will be quoted without comment of any kind. This, indeed, is the only possible way to present them. They are not even arranged *seriatim*, for this would serve no purpose in furthering the intention with which they are now published—namely, the help and comfort of those who are seeking and finding their vocation in the Religious Life. At the same time, there is little or nothing in these letters which is not—on another plane—equally applicable to devout Catholics living "in the world."

(i) "I thought I would let a month or so elapse before writing, so that you could settle in, and have time to know what the great change means to you before being troubled by the outside world.

"I do much wonder how you are finding it all; and hope that every day confirms you in your resolution to follow our Lord in the Religious Life. It is such a magnificent call, and



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given to so few. Our Blessed Lord has so taken you at your word, and allowed you to give up everything for Him; and very soon He will begin to give it all back, transformed and glorified—as He alone knows how to do it.

"I like to think of you too in that beautiful country, with the hills round you, as round Jerusalem. I wonder whether you ever have that sensation that the Altar is the centre, not only of grace but of nature—that a sort of radiation comes out from it, and sanctifies the hills and the sky; and then, to one's feeble spiritual sense, shrinks back again and is concentrated once more on the Altar, like a spot of light that alternately focusses and spreads from a centre. So that it is true that 'all things are yours'—that you are not deprived, essentially, of the beauties of the world, because you have them all in the Altar.

"It is rather a comforting thought, I think, when one's love of nature is constrained for any reason; and also when spiritual things become dim, and one longs passionately for nature. In whichever mood one is, one has a kind of essential grasp on both.

". . . I heard a touching story the other day. (By the way, it wasn't you who told it me, was it?) An old Irishwoman came to a priest, not

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long ago, and gave him a stipend to say Mass for the soul of Oliver Cromwell. She said that all Catholics abused him, and none seemed to wish to pray for him. . . .

" God bless and keep you, and give you courage and grace and consolation."

(ii) " It is quite plain that God has something else waiting for you. He does not act so clearly without purpose, though it is hard to see it sometimes. And it is plain, too, that He means you to wait a little and rest. . . . Indeed, there is nothing in the world to be depressed or anxious about. We need only be anxious when we have not made the surrender of the will: and that you have done and are doing. This incident purifies anything that may have been left to purify, by the hardest of all processes—and the most thorough—a slow fire. . . . But I am *confident* that a new door will open soon, and that physical and mental peace will come back. I believe you have already spiritual peace.

" After all, optimism is true, and pessimism is utterly and fundamentally false. I know you know that in your will, if not in your heart; and the will is the only thing that matters. And God is good, not bad: and just, and not capri-

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cious: and careful, and not careless. And once one has hold of that, nothing else really matters.

"As for melancholia . . . that too depends on the will. Doctors tell us that now—and that thousands of the mentally-afflicted only become so through consent of their will: so just do nothing, and do not fret or be anxious. Hold on, and say your prayers as 'deadly' as you please, and sleep and eat and bear noise as well as you can: and remember that God is good. God bless you and keep you.

"Tell me if I can do anything more than pray and remember you at the Altar. And do tell me as soon as a door begins to open, even by a chink."

(iii) "Indeed I do agree with all my heart that you have a Religious Vocation. I have no doubt about that at all. The only question is, where? And even that God will answer for you when the proper time comes.

"May I suggest something, that you certainly know already—and that is that, when that kind of incapacity for prayer comes on, you are not meant to pray. I have often found in my own experience, that those times are the most fruitful of all, and the *most full of consolation*; if you

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will just sit still before the Tabernacle and say:

"'Now, Lord: I can do nothing.
You must do it *all*.'

"If one will be steady at that; and simply drop, not struggle with, anxiety and distraction, He *will* speak; and in the most marvellous way. Not always—but again and again. Then He draws back and waits: then comes forward again: until at last one has one irresistible impulse of adoration and love, that lasts just a moment.

"When that is over, if it is near the end of the time that one had fixed, it is as well to get up and go away at once. I believe that one makes the greatest progress of all at such times: not merely because it is unpleasant, but because one real word from our Lord, and one real word back, is worth more than all the intricate fuss one makes about points and preludes and pictures, when there is no real movement at all.

"Forgive me for reminding you of all this. I am sure you know it all: only the devil makes us forget sometimes."

(iv) "Here is a Vocation driving you, in spite of likes and dislikes, and here is an open door. You can certainly do nothing but go through."

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(v) "I hope you have not let yourself be in the least discouraged as regards the Religious Life. It is difficult to imagine you, permanently, as anything but a Religious. Do you know the way in which people's circumstances represent themselves to one's mind, pictorially? I can see you now, plainly, in the hall of a sort of palace, which is the Catholic Church, safe out of the storm outside—knocking and listening and waiting at inner doors that lead to the Throne-Room.

"Of course you will [enter Religion]: the only question is, where?

"Above all, I congratulate you on the prospect of the Retreat. I hope you will let me know when it begins, that I may say Mass for you on the first morning."

(vi) "Now that you have got your Vocation clear, the rest does not matter. When God puts a principle into our hands, we can trust Him for the details.

". . . Well there is not much in this letter. But it gives me more happiness than I can say to know that you are seeing your way clear at last. Everything will sort itself. I knew it would; because your will was right; and intellectual and emotional difficulties cannot stand

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long against that. God bless you now and always."

(vii) "To-morrow I shall say Mass for you here. It is the greatest joy to think of you at ——; and that your great Vocation is beginning, please God, to dawn. It is hard to think you can be making a mistake this time; when everything human is against it; and nothing but an inner conviction for it.

"I know you will remember me in your prayers. I think one ought to value the prayers [of a Religious] more than anything. If anyone can merit grace, they can.

"Your dream has the true mystical ring. Sometimes that ring is terrifying and sometimes inspiring—one always feels that such dreams are not like others, simply echoes of one's waking thoughts. . . .

"And now you are beginning again, like a little child; taking as they come, not only the great things, but the little things as well: receiving them all equally from authority; and I suppose that it is there that perfection lies. It is easy enough to take great events as from God—death, catastrophe, joy—but it is so infinitely harder to take the time you get up, and the sound of a bell, and a rebuke—also from God.

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Yet reason as well as Faith tells us that they are from Him, and no one else.

"And so, please God, you will go on now bringing 'every thought into subjection' as well as every action: but the first will come last, when the habit of the second is established.

"It does seem to me so shallow for people to call the *minutiæ* of the Religious Life, little things, and to despise them. Thought cannot be under the dominion of the will—still less emotion—unless action is there first. And how is one to train action, except by a thousand tiny acts?

"Well—you know all this much better than I do. I certainly can't give you advice: but I can give you prayers, and those I will with all my heart.

"God bless you again, and give you your heart's desire; and all the desires of the Sacred Heart for you! And what more can one say?"

(viii) "How hard it is to know how to say all that one wishes in answer to your letter this morning! The whole situation is just the old paradox, 'Love one another,' and 'Whoso hateth not father and mother' . . .

"I have no sort of doubt that you feel with me that in this case it is the second clause that

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you have to act on. In our Lord's paradoxes we have perpetually to oscillate; acting on each limb of it as if there were no other; and then back again to the other.

"It seems to me that the object of a novice-ship—primarily—is to develop one's own relations with God; and secondarily with man. Once the first is right, the second will follow. I should advise, then, *with all my power*, that you should set up before yourself at meditation, Mass, prayer . . . an ideal relation between your soul and God, in which you are dependent on nobody for inspiration or happiness. And then make deliberate acts of welcome of every incident that illustrates or enforces that ideal relationship:—that is to say, concentrate your grip on your will, and deliberately lay hold—in spite of sorrow or humiliation—on every misunderstanding or grief that comes. The secret of all progress in religion, art, learning, and everything else, is to have an ideal towards which one works. It is that, surely, that is meant by the Kingdom of God being within us: it is within us as an Idea, before it becomes without us as a Reality.

"I am saying all this most obscurely:—I still say, make no plans except as regards this relationship between your soul and God; but as

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events come up one by one, seize them and assimilate them.

"As regards what you fear in the future, it is the same thing. The fact that you have not got those trials at their intensest now, is a sign that you cannot bear them yet; but the penalty of possessing an imagination is that one is continually falling into depression through being able to foresee. Refuse to foresee. You are not in the future, but the present tense. Say to yourself, 'My whole world lies here and now. I have nothing whatever to do with anything but my present state and place. God has taken me out of the secular world in order that I may be free from the anxieties of the secular world, to serve Him in quietness. I must not bring them here, with me.'

"Let me say this, too. Your letter shows quite plainly that God has let you see your work that is to be done in your own soul. If He had given you nothing but joy it would mean, without the shadow of a doubt, that He had not opened to you the depths of the Religious Life; and that He was allowing you to live upstairs. But He has taken you not only into a [Religious House], but into the Religious Life.

"So be perfectly confident and courageous: and remember with all your might that you are

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not in this world any longer; that human relationships in the Religious Life are entirely different to human relationships in the world—that they are thinner and purer and finer—like a higher atmosphere; and that they must be kept free from any feverish heat of attraction or repulsion. . . . There is a wonderful freedom that follows that lesson: it gives one a new idea altogether of the mystical union of the faithful in the Body of Christ. . . . If all this seems a series of elementary platitudes, you must forgive me.

"I think, however, that I see from far off, that the same transformation of relationship is true as regards that between God and the Soul. In the world one is feverish, and dependent on signs of His favour, and sensible devotion. In the Religious Life it is not so. Our Lord shows His favourites not His Sacred Heart only, but the Crown of Thorns surrounding it. One cannot embrace that Heart in the Religious Life without embracing the Crown of Thorns as well.

"Of course the transition is bitterly hard. One runs forward to clasp God and souls, and is instantly pierced.

"You have now to leave all external things—all signs of affection—to welcome all apparent hostility. God is teaching you that now, with

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regard to other people. If you learn that well, He will teach you the same thing as regards Himself. I shall be very much surprised if, in six months from now—more or less—you do not find the same sorrows in your internal devotion to our Lord. 'Touch me not—I am not yet ascended to My Father.' . . .

"God bless you always, and give you your heart's desire."

(ix) "What can I say—except that God knows better than you and I? It is very hard to understand why you should suffer like this; but the very elaborateness of the process shows that there is some elaborate result that we cannot possibly understand.

"There is no need to tell you not to be disheartened. From your letter I know that you are doing all in your power not to be. There is nothing in the world to do but to wait on God. One thing, at any rate, you will have learned, even if you have not learned it before (and for which I envy you), that God will not be dictated to even in the most loving way. He has His Own Perfect Will; and He will do it. The only thing we have to do is to wait until we know what it is.

"I am preaching to-night on 'This is the Will

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of God, your Sanctification'; and what is happening to you will be an additional comment in my mind on one point I want to make—that the result of every detail—even the most bewildering, whether large or small—is the production of the holy character; that circumstances and events are not the essence but the accidents of life—character alone is the essence. This is the only possible key to life; and the encouragement is that it is not our will that is the chief element in sanctification, but God's.

"We have no right to call *things* 'failures.' The only failure possible is to fail to meet circumstances with acquiescence. An 'event' cannot be a failure. I know you believe this; and will be brave in remembering it.

". . . God bless you always, and show you His Will plainly. I know you will send me a line to-night or to-morrow. You will be in my thoughts all day. Again, God bless you!"

(In this connection a sentence of Monsignor Benson's in a sermon preached, years ago, on Good Friday, at the Carmelite Church, Kensington, may be recalled. "We are all Failures—and the best of us are those that know it!")

(x) "It seems to me that, with a sorrow of this kind, the difficulty is to get it *into* one's



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heart. It is so apt to hammer and beat on it from the outside, so that sensation goes, and one is aware of nothing. As soon as one has succeeded in drawing it really into one's heart, its work is done, and it becomes a fire within, instead of simple and unintelligible pain without. But that cannot happen at once. I pray that it may happen soon with you.

"Of course I am as puzzled as you are—on the intellectual understanding of it all. But it does not at all interfere with my faith that you have a Religious Vocation. In fact, it is hard to imagine any event (external) that could interfere with it. I can only grant that it has postponed the fulfilment of that Vocation."

(xi) "It is very hard to advise indeed! But on the whole this seems to me the natural solution.

"You have left everything in God's Hands; and He has answered by giving you a Religious Vocation. This is the primary thing. Everything else, such as the kind of life, the saying of the Office, the habit, &c., are all secondary. Therefore, so soon as an open door comes, into the Religious Life, I think that you should go through it, and leave what you will find there to God entirely.

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"I am not sure whether this is what you thought I should say, but I don't see any other answer. At the same time I think you are perfectly right to write to ——; and if the result is that *two* doors open, then you have the right to look through and choose. . . . Have you read *Heaven Opened?* If not, READ it. It is astonishing. It is by a Trappist."

(xii) "You have asked me an extraordinarily hard thing: and I do pray I may not say anything contrary to God's Will.

"It seems to me that the only thing is simplicity. May I sum up my thoughts in sections?

"(1) In complications such as yours the only thing to do is to take the first open door, unless there are *strong* reasons against it, in which case it ceases to be an open door.

"(2) The —— Order is the one to which you have always felt strongly drawn; therefore you are justified in looking first to see whether this is impossible. But I agree with —— that to *demand* it, by going to Australia or America, is not simple waiting upon God. It is rather like trying to force His hand. . . .

"(3) . . . . . .

"(4) Supposing —— remains closed, then I

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should consider this [other alternative]. You must find out whether . . . the life is possible for you, in point of hardness, &c. . . . If so, I do not say that it is *impossible* for you to go . . . but I do think that it is unlikely to be God's Will for you. . . .

"A thing like this would be 'heroic.' In interior drawings towards an heroic action, one has to be very much on one's guard against a peculiarly subtle form of presumption. It is extremely hard to distinguish, in that third depth of the soul, between God's Voice and its counterfeit; and the Voice has to be tested severely by common light. If it will stand the common light, it is good: if not, it must be resisted. . . . One thing is certain: you must not do it at all in a hurry. If God means you to do it, He will (1) close other doors; (2) open this one wide; (3) leave it standing open, and beckon you not only in interior feelings, but in external circumstances.

"Do I make myself clear?

"I shall say Mass for you on Sunday here; and pray that I may know what advice to give. It is extraordinarily hard and complicated; and we must both keep quiet and simple in dealing with it: and above all, patient. I hope you will prevent yourself from using your imagination

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in the question. It will not be truly solved by that."

(xiii) "I have been overrun with various things since coming back here last week. Also I wanted time for my 'subjective self' to answer. Your letter and enclosure this morning makes it clear. You must not go to the ——; at least it seems to me the *wrong* sort of madness to think of it. (I am aware there is a divine madness which must be obeyed.) . . .

"It seems to me rather that you should try other Houses than —— now. I do not say, enter them. But try the doors gently and see if they open. . . . One cannot say that the Divine Office is an essential: it is only a considerable accident: and Perpetual Adoration surely can be set against that? . . . It seems to me, things that may be 'accidents' should not be allowed to weigh against the 'substance'—*i.e.* the Religious Life. It is not as if you had not given due weight to the 'accidents.' But don't let them fetter you.

"It also seems to me that you should not say 'I should not like this or that Order because it is not old.' On your side you offer yourself to God as a Religious—that is the simple, bare fact. You add, as in a petition, 'If it is Thy

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Will I should like an old Order.' It is perfectly right to do that; but you cannot insist. *You are giving to God, not receiving from Him.* This is becoming clearer and clearer, so far as I have sight to see or right to speak. That is what I meant by 'trying other doors now.' How if the Renunciation lies in the renunciation of the spiritual romance that lies round the old Orders? I do not say that it does, but that it may.

"I am thinking in ink now; or rather, am putting down the kinds of thoughts that have come to me this last week. Will you consider them, and see what you think? If you say you are sure I am wrong, I shall accept that wholeheartedly. I dare say I am. . . . Behave as a Saint. That is surely the secret: and I know you are trying with all your might."

(xiv) "Indeed you must not be in the least discouraged! You are not responsible, and Almighty God is! . . .

"As to ——, I can only say that my feelings are strongly against it. And that I may be wrong. But you want to know what I think, after all.

"It seems to me that it would be trying to *make* God give you St. ——'s habit. And the worst of it is that He might do it, and you would

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regret it ever afterwards. He sometimes does give us things we *demand*, and we are sorry all the rest of our lives.

"I really think it is far more trustful to try these other [places]. If the doors don't open, we can see. But if they do——!

". . . And do not be in the least cast down. What can we do but repeat over and over again the alphabet of Faith—which is that God is Good, and Almighty? That holds all possible consolation in a trouble of this kind."

(xv) "You must not be unhappy for a moment. It is God's doing, not yours. Take it from His Hand, and be absolutely content. Nothing in the whole world can separate you from Him; and if He wishes you to serve Him in the world, you cannot be happy in a cloister. If He wishes you to serve Him in a cloister, the whole world cannot stop you. So be perfectly content, and wait on Him. . . .

"I feel nothing but the most intense sympathy with the struggle against rebellion that I know you must be going through, and complete confidence that you will win the victory.

"If God's Will is 'continual failure' for you, then embrace that gladly and cheerfully. After all, that kind of 'failure' is the only success

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worth having; since it is what our Lord Himself achieved on the Cross.

"Do not care *what* people say.

"Dicunt! Quid dicunt? DICANT!

"Meanwhile I can say nothing at all, except God bless you, guide you, and finish His good work in you."

(xvi) "Don't lose heart for an instant. Almighty God is arranging all this: in fact, He *has* arranged it: do not forget that: only keep watch on His Will.

"May He bless you always, and show it to you soon."

(xvii) "I can't agree with you at all, of course, that if you are not to be a Religious your life even resembles a delusion. What alone really matters was your will to serve God as perfectly as possible *in whatever circumstances He may direct.* That is the reality: all the rest depends on Him only. That is why a novitiate is necessary—to find out whether those circumstances are what He intends.

"Please do not make up your mind about anything except your entire willingness to please God. . . .

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". . . As regards the Religious Vocation altogether, one must take God's actions as signs. Remember, He does control or permit every detail that happens; and health is one of them. . . . Please think about this; and 'hearken what the Lord God will say concerning you.'

"God bless you again, now and always."

(xviii) "I am more sorry than I can say. You know that: and how I do feel it is *terribly* hard. But that must not prevent me from saying what I think in other respects. . . . It is absolutely necessary that you should be resigned to God's Will fundamentally: and that you should internally embrace that Will. There is a real danger for you, as for all of us, that you should say: 'I will accept God's Will enthusiastically, wherever it should lead me, *except in one single direction.*' We must not make conditions of this sort. It seems to me possible—I cannot say more—that Almighty God has allowed obstacles in the way of your Religious Life, for this very reason—that He is determined to win you entirely and fundamentally; and when that is done He may have some tremendous gift. Grant even the 'worst'—that you should break down at home in health, and die—before you are able



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to enter Religion—well! that after all is not unlike Calvary, where every single scheme seemed to break down and fail in pitch darkness. After all, this life is only a very tiny fragment of Eternity.

"Really, platitudes are the sum of wisdom. We are always trying to escape from them, and to embroider, and soar, and swoop; but God is always melting our wings and bringing us down again, flat—until we perceive that lying flat is about the highest achievement we can possibly attain, and that being broken to little bits is the greatest result of Divine Art.

"Do let yourself *go*—into God's Hands. Don't let yourself say, even in a whisper to yourself, 'I can't bear it.' Because you know, you can bear it. To resist always hurts. To yield, never does.

"Everything seems to point to all this. . . . It seems that God will have His way! Recognise that then; and be at peace. And thank God that He is giving you next week not only the splendid tragedy, but the squalor and sordidness of His Passion—and above all, the loneliness of it.

"God bless you always. You must not think me hard. I am trying with all my might to learn these things myself."

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(xix) "In the meantime I do entreat you to look at the whole matter from the standpoint of 'the first five minutes after death.' What will you then wish to have done—to have accepted God's arrangements *cordially*, or not? Because don't you think that it really does come to that? . . .

"—— is absolutely serene and happy. He says he understands at last that the one and only thing that matters is that God's Will should be done in him. . . . He has learnt, too, one other lesson, that 'the Kingdom of God is within'; and that in the Kingdom of God are all his friends; and that therefore he possesses them all for ever so long as he conforms himself to God's Will, and does not struggle or rebel. Well, there he is! I envy and admire him enormously. God bless you always."

(xx) "You know that God has all these things in the palm of His hand; and if it is not to be, it must not be. . . . Does it not seem, with all these tantalisations, that God is simply giving you test after test until the last traces of wilfulness are exhausted? So it seems to me. He is doing exactly the same thing to me in another way. . . . We had much better give in at once, and say 'I will be guided by inevitable circum-

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stances, not by unrealisable desires.' The moment one's whole heart *absolutely* says that, and one's whole mind says Amen, probably He will let one do what He *really* wishes us to do.

"I haven't told you about myself, for a number of reasons: (1) there is very little to tell; (2) it is bad for egotism; (3) there is no time to do anything . . . (4), (5), (6), (7)! . . ."

(xxi) "Since it is so, it is so. What I partly meant when I wrote was that perhaps suffering was meant to be your vocation, and therefore to be welcomed. But it seems not. It cannot be meant so by God unless He conveys the conviction of it to you. I shall pray that it may be so. I am so glad that you have seen Tremans. It is a lovely place."

(xxii) "There are two ways of knowing God—as He is in Himself or through His creatures—and if the second is your vocation, so be it.

"There is no question of 'disappointment.' I am only glad that you know what God wants of you."

(xxiii) "As you say, solitude shows one's weakness. I think that a tendency to resent little things—'trifles,' as you say—so very much, is not promising for the Religious Life, which

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consists so largely of significant trifles. However, I dare say I'm wrong again."

(xxiv) "It seems to me that the letter . . . which you enclosed, and which I re-enclose, ought not to be neglected.

"Your desire for the —— Order was so strong that I do not think you ought to pass by a possible opening on account of what is, after all, only a *detail*. The teaching may seem utterly repugnant; but it is no more than an accident. . . . Will you think it over for twenty-four hours and go to Holy Communion with an intention of getting guidance? The letter seems to me really hopeful. I believe you will think with me that so long as a chink of the —— door shows itself, you ought not to pass on to another. . . . I will say Mass for you on Tuesday morning with the same intention. God bless you."

(xxv) "Just a line, in the most terrible haste, to congratulate you with all my heart. It seems just perfectly arranged: I knew it would be: God never shuts one door without opening another of some kind. . . . Simplicity is EVERYTHING, as our Lord tells us again and again. It is when we become elaborate and 'careful' that things go wrong."

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(xxvi) " I was so much delighted to hear from you; though I had always taken, as you said, no news for good news. But now it is news that is good news. I haven't had a letter that gave me such pleasure for a long while. It is quite plain that you know the worst, and can stand it; and that you know the best, and can appreciate it. To find poverty and saints together is an enormous blessing; and to understand them both is even greater.

" The only thing that I can say is to advise you to take both these things right down into your will. We can bear almost anything when we embrace it; it is when pain or anxiety fret away at our emotions or intellect, that they become intolerable. So take this Poverty right into your arms, and make yourself prefer, not like, the darkness and the cold and the food, and every other single detail that hurts. It is when we resist the Crown of Thorns, or have the Cross put upon us, instead of taking it, that we are wounded and bruised. But I am quite sure that you know this. . . . Only go on doing it. Particularly do that about ' loneliness in a crowd.' Really, solitude is one of the greatest things in the world. ' In solitude Christ speaks to the heart, as a modest lover, who embraces not His beloved before all the world.' The lover of Jesus

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'sits apart from the noise, but glorying in Christ.' There is another thing, too. Use the externals that are unfamiliar to you as a means of realising the internal fact behind them. Our Lord stands in a kind of Tower, with windows all round. One window is Gothic and severe; another is Renaissance and filled with sham pink flowers; another is the grimy window of a cottage; and it really does not matter in the least through which window you look. In fact, the more windows you look through the more you see of Him. There is a view of Him through the Renaissance window that is unique. And take the ash-tree outside your window as a kind of relief, through which you can catch a glimpse, from your old life in the world. Take the dark passages . . .—everything—in the same way; like St. Patrick in his Breastplate; remembering that there is not one single thing in the whole world, including even sins or stupidities of other people, which God does not use for teaching you something which you cannot otherwise learn.

"Work out too that ideal relation with God. Exactly as in Society one has to be courteous though one may not feel it, so there is an etiquette in spiritual things. The Little Office is a case in point; it really does not matter whether you like it or not; the thing to do is to conform.

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"Never mind about the extra-direction or the Rule that appears to forbid it. You are not responsible for the Rule: they know it, and you cannot yet. Don't be ashamed at having been 'expansive'; but remind yourself that your highest ideal is to lie flat and ridiculous before God and His servants, until every flicker of pride is stamped out. . . .

"'Desire for foreign travel.' Please reflect on this point, which is a platitude of platitudes, that in possessing Christ you possess the Lord and Creator of Heaven and Earth; and that when you are in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament you are in the presence of Him Who thought and loved the world into being. There is no sight or sound that you do not possess in chapel.

"The thought that you would do better in another convent, you must just resist like a temptation. It is a symptom of *accidiè*, diagnosed centuries ago. No; there you are at ——; you went there without the help of 'desire,' and you must not let 'desire' speak one word on the subject. Nothing at all but the Hand of God, acting independently of yourself, must take you away. Remember that He can take you away to-morrow, if He wills it.

"In everything, then, live by the Will, not the emotions. Remember that your Will is sovereign,

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that the emotions are only extremely untrustworthy councillors: you must teach them their place. Snub them if they fret: don't let them interfere in what is not their business. Don't let the mind formulate the stammering of the emotions: the moment you allow that they become formidable. Just live like an autocrat, remembering that you are a vassal of God.

"Lastly, I believe you have found your Vocation there. The more I read your letter the more I think it. . . .

"And please at all times remember me before God; it will be a real strength to think that I have an intercessor in a Religious, besides the objective good your prayers will do me.

"God bless you always, and give you perseverance."

Nothing could bring this series of perfect letters to a close more touchingly than the following exquisite message of comfort and hope, which will come home to every heart which knew the writer:

"This must only be a line to tell you what sympathy I feel for you in your great sorrow. Yet it does seem more and more—I was going to say almost more every day—that death is after all the supreme blessing of life—at least, such a

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death as that. It is the turning over of the seamy side, and showing the true silk and embroidery in place of the ragged ends. May God grant her great happiness as she looks upon that, and above all when she sees how every effort she made has been wrought up into the robe of Jesus Christ.

"And may He comfort you, too, and let you see it."

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Edinburgh & London

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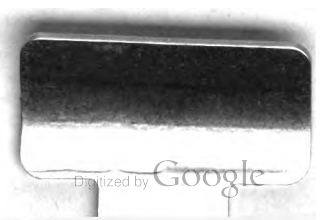
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